"CONTRABAND"

RANDALL PARRISH

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Gerald Eller
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Xmas 1916

"CONTRABAND"

The escape from the sinking yacht

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"CONTRABAND"

A Romance of the North Atlantic

BY

RANDALL PARRISH

Author of "When Wilderness was King," "My Lady of the North," "The Red Mist," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED

CHICAGO

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"CONTRABAND"

CHAPTER I

ONE OF A YACHT PARTY

So many items bearing upon those strange adventures which have lately befallen me have found publication in the newspapers, oftentimes distorted and untrue, and resulting in letters of inquiry from friends, induce me now to write out the tale while the incidents remain fresh in memory. Indeed, I owe the truth not only to myself but even more to her who so bravely shared with me those days and nights of peril. In doing this, which I now conceive to be a duty, I require no imagination, no knowledge of literary art, for all I need tell is the simple truth in plain, direct language, just as I might relate it to companions at the Club. The story, unusual as it may appear to those whose lives have ever been bounded by the commonplace, was natural enough under the circumstances, and the telling of it should be equally unartificial. I have nothing to conceal, and my one desire is to record the truth.

The earlier passion of my life was the sea, and, when others of my age were grinding away through their courses in college, I was apprenticed to the merchant

service in a fleet largely owned by my father, trading between New York and northern European ports. Loving the work, and, possibly, assisted by the fact that I was my father's son, I rose rapidly, until licensed as captain of steam, and assigned to command the *Vulcan*, a freighter of three thousand tons. At thirty, however, the novelty and fascination of a sea life ceased its attraction, and when my father died sufficient property became my share from the estate to enable my resigning this command, and retiring permanently from the service. Circumstances, unnecessary now to relate, caused me to make permanent home in Chicago, where I soon became engrossed in business, finding my sole recreation in yachting upon the Great Lakes. My interest in this sport, and my ownership of a steam yacht of unusual power, greatly widened my circle of acquaintance. Such were the rather commonplace surroundings of my life, when, at thirty-seven, adventure suddenly called me out into the unknown.

Nothing could have been more unexpected than the occasion which took me to New York. Carrington — Gerald Carrington, the Copper King — had just placed his new steam yacht, the *Esmeralda*, in commission, and was eager to christen it by a run across to the ports of Spain. He wrote urging me to become one of the party. The temptation was irresistible, for, as I knew Mrs. Carrington was in Europe, the guests on board would undoubtedly all be men, and probably congenial fellows. A bachelor myself, the long hours at sea had left me unaccustomed to the society of

women, whose presence I avoided whenever possible. Hence, I accepted Carrington's invitation immediately by wire, hastily packed the few things necessary for the trip, and unaccompanied by even a valet caught the Twentieth Century for New York. I arrived there July 28, 1914, registering at the Biltmore, with no thought of adventure in my mind, but only anticipations of a pleasant, uneventful outing amid men of my own class, and an opportunity to view a land which I had never before visited.

Carrington lived on Long Island, and I talked with him on the phone. There were to be twelve in the party, the names of two, who were former acquaintances, alone being mentioned in our brief conversation. The yacht was lying at Tompkinsville, provisioned, and ready for the sea. I must be on board by three o'clock the following day, and he gave me quite explicit instructions as to the best mode of reaching the vessel. The remainder of the day was passed in calling upon certain old acquaintances in the city, and the reading of special newspaper editions, depicting the prospect of war in Europe. As Spain was in no way likely to become involved, I merely perused these reports with languid interest.

An accident to the ferry caused me to miss the local train which I had anticipated taking the next morning, and I was consequently the last of our yachting party to arrive at Tompkinsville. The others were already safely aboard when I hurried across the gangplank, to receive the cordial welcome of Carrington, who imme-

diately ordered the vessel underway. The guests must have been gathered on the upper deck, enjoying the excitement of departure, for I caught no glimpse of anyone on board, excepting some members of the crew, as the steward led me to the cabin assigned to my use during the voyage. It was a sea parlor, evidently exclusively mine, as no other luggage was visible, containing a brass bed securely anchored to the deck, and every imaginable convenience. As I stood, gazing out through the open port at the Long Island shore slipping swiftly past, I could not but contrast the comfort and luxury of the present with my old quarters on the freighter. It was like a leap into fairyland.

Even the brief view I had obtained of the boat impressed me strongly, both with its beauty, and seagoing qualities. I was sailor enough to appreciate all this at a glance. The *Esmeralda* was quite evidently the last word in marine construction — a plaything to a man to whom expense meant little. I was aboard a steam yacht, schooner-rigged aloft, of over fifteen-hundred tons, constructed for deep-water cruising, well-manned, and able to combat the storms of any ocean. Within, the furnishings were rich and tasteful, while the manner in which she slipped through the waters evidenced the mighty power of the engines. Within my stateroom the vibrations of the screw were scarcely perceptible, yet already we must have been traveling seaward at fifteen knots.

I opened the door and emerged into the main cabin. It was deserted, except for a waiter or two attired in

white jackets who had covered a long table suspended by stanchions from the deck beams above, and were spreading it with snowy linen in preparation for the six o'clock meal. Never had I seen a more cosy, homelike interior. Finished in circassian walnut, the side walls, between stateroom doors, decorated with original paintings by artists of reputation, ornamented by numerous easy chairs upholstered in leather, and containing a piano and harp, together with several shelves of books, it formed a delightful picture of convenience and comfort.

Six staterooms ranged along either side, while two, evidently somewhat larger, were behind the great butt of the mizzen mast, which was surrounded by a commodious divan, inviting repose. Above, in a peculiarly constructed rack, were numerous curious weapons securely fastened in place, collected from strange tribes throughout the seven seas. Forward, an open passage, guarded only by silently swinging doors, led to the steward's pantry, and various storerooms beyond, while beside this opening a broad, brass-railed stairway led easily to the upper deck. Sunlight touched the edge of the companion-way, and flickered down through a half-opened skylight above, yielding cheerfulness to the scene, yet inviting to the open air. I would meet those with whom I was destined to companion on this voyage across summer seas.

I paused in the shelter of the companion, feeling now more decidedly the movement of the vessel, and realizing that we were encountering a strong head wind, with

a fairly heavy sea. This but contributed to my enjoyment of the scene, and at first my whole attention was concentrated on the wide expanse of green water, white-capped, and shimmering beneath the sun's rays. To the right, extended the beautiful Long Island shore, so plainly visible I could perceive all the houses of a village, while on the other hand the broad expanse of the Sound appeared deserted, except for a single distant sail showing white against the water.

Before me, the spotlessly clean deck of the *Esmeralda* extended almost to the butt of the foremast, the emergency boom strapped tightly out of the way and protected by tarpaulin, every rope's end carefully coiled, three white boats locked in the davits at either side, their canvas covers buttoned down firmly. The white paint shone in the sunshine, and the brasswork glittered dazzlingly. The vessel was, indeed, a picture of rare beauty as she raced bravely forward, rising buoyantly to the waves, the wind singing through the taut rigging aloft. My eyes followed the graceful sweep of the low, open rail to the very peak of the forecastle, where a group of sailors, in uniforms of white duck, were gathered beside the windlass. Above them, his hand on the butt of the bowsprit, stood a solitary figure, the lookout, as clearly outlined against the blue of the sky as though chiseled from marble.

The deck, amidships, was clear, not even so much as a closed hatch disfiguring the level surface. Beyond was the bridge, with its rails of gleaming brass, and below, an open door facing aft, revealed the chart

house. I could see enough of its interior from where I stood to discern a table, and several chairs, with the outlines of a map hanging against the further wall. Above all arose the wheelhouse, while on the narrow bridge two officers, uniformed in dark-blue, with white caps, moved back and forth, or stood motionless, binoculars to their eyes.

No passengers, however, were visible, yet this mystery was soon explained as I stepped to one side and glanced aft. The cabin projection was not high, yet sufficiently so to break the force of the head wind, and besides was far enough advanced to give ample deck space at the stern. Here an awning had been erected, and beneath its shelter were gathered the vessel's guests. All visible were men, and their occupation, as well as their carelessness of dress, assured me instantly there were no women aboard. The trip, as I naturally inferred, was to be strictly informal, an outing of good fellows. I recognized but three in the group — Carrington, red-faced and white-haired, a cigar gripped in his teeth, giving some instructions to the steward ; Fosdick, tall, slim, thin-lipped, a lawyer well known to corporations who desired to keep just within legal restrictions, sat at a table his hand fingering a half-filled glass while he talked to the men opposite ; and McCann, fat, good-natured, born to his father's millions, who amused himself by the pretense of being a broker, interrupting the game of cards, in which he was engaged with three others, to tell the latest story of the street. Personally I cared little for either of these

men, yet had known both, in a way, for some time. The others, judging from outward appearances, had been recruited from about the same class — business acquaintances of Carrington, no doubt; men whose friendship he might need, and who would naturally appreciate his courtesy; perchance a copper pool was planned, and this pleasant opportunity taken to get them all together. This was, indeed, quite possible, and might account for my invitation as well, for Carrington was aware I had idle money. The vague suspicion caused me to smile as I went forward, greeting those whom I knew, and being duly presented to the others.

Whatever they might have been in a business way, and for that I cared absolutely nothing, they proved themselves a most companionable bunch of fellows to meet, two of them mentioning pleasantly that they had known my father, and one — a somewhat younger man named Shaw — claiming to have chummed with me the year before at a banquet in Chicago. Fosdick clung to me like a long lost brother, seating me next the rail, our conversation drifting toward the prospect of war in Europe; a number of others soon became interested, and gathered about us in a group. Fosdick cynically sneered at the whole matter, arguing that it was merely a newspaper sensation; that civilization had advanced altogether too far to even permit of another great war. I contended otherwise, feeling assured that human nature had not vitally changed within the space of a few years, and that the world was still far from the

end of combat. Others joined in the discussion — Shaw and Schawb, the latter, evidently of German ancestry, becoming rather bitter in reviewing the causes of the trouble. We were still at it, much to Carrington's evident disgust, when the gong called us below.

The memory of that first meal in the snug after-cabin of the *Esmeralda* remains a most pleasant recollection. Whatever animosity had been engendered on deck, seemed to vanish instantly as we took our places about the hospitable table. The cabin had been darkened, and the soft light of a swinging lamp gleamed back from snowy damask, and glittering silver. The center was banked with flowers, the service was perfection, and the *chef* quite evidently a genius. We lingered over the wine and cigars, the conversation drifting where it would. McCann played and sang; several of the younger men joining him, and when we finally retired again to the deck, night had settled quietly down over the waters.

CHAPTER II

A WOMAN ON BOARD

I BELIEVE I was among the first to leave the table and return outside, and as my inclination was to remain alone and enjoy the calm of the night, I ventured forward along the deserted deck, until I found fancied security from observation in the shadow of a small boat. The others, as they emerged later from the companion, outlined a moment against the light, turned once again aft, and resumed their old places. I could hear the murmur of their voices and the chink of poker chips, but was content myself to lean above the rail, and stare out across the dark waters. It was a still, starry night, with here and there a flickering distant light visible. The sea had gone down somewhat, and the wind was no longer strong.

Apparently we were considerably further off shore, and the flashing of a red-and-white beacon far away to the right, gave me some knowledge of our position — off Eaton's Point. By dawn then we should be breasting the long swells of the broad Atlantic. The old love of the sea came back as I breathed in gratefully once more the salt air, and stared out over the black water. The rumbling of the screw, the trembling of the deck underfoot, the splash of waves alongside, were old familiar music. I was indeed glad to be there; to

dream of the long delightful voyage ahead, and drink in once more the fascinating mystery of the sea.

I know not how long I stood there, smoking and dreaming of the past; once I crossed over to port, watching a great Sound steamer glide silently past us, every opening a blaze of light, her decks crowded with people; and once we barely escaped collision with a little fishing smack, flying before the wind for some Long Island haven, with not even a lantern strung at her masthead. I heard the sharp cry of the officer on our bridge, and leaned over to catch a glimpse of frightened faces peering upward at me, as the little craft went tearing past, as instantly lost in the smother astern. The incident gave me a thrill such as I had not experienced in years, and I could understand the injured feelings of the mate, as he leaned far out over the bridge rail, and cursed into the black night.

Nothing else occurred, however, to break the monotony, and finally wearying of it all, I went below, being in no mind to join at games with the others. I met Carrington at the companion, where we exchanged a few words, mine largely in excuse for retiring so early. Even as I rested on my bed, McCann's high pitched voice reached me through the open port, with an occasional burst of laughter. Nevertheless I was soon asleep.

Some dormant sense of seamanship, aroused to new life perhaps by my brief watch on deck, must have awakened me. For I sat straight up in bed, conscious that the vessel's motion had ceased. All was silent; no

jar shook the keel, no footsteps sounded on the deck above. I switched on the electric light, and glanced at my watch; it was slightly after midnight. Through the open port nothing was visible but the dark waters, and the far-off gleam of a light, alternating in flashes of white. I did not know enough of this coast line to identify the signal, yet it was plainly evident we were some distance from land.

Why the *Esmeralda* had stopped her engines was no special concern of mine, and I lay down again. But sleep would not return. I tossed and turned, and finally arising in sheer desperation hastily donned my clothes. The after cabin was deserted, dimly lighted by one shaded electric globe, beneath which the brass stair-rails shone dully. I emerged onto the deck, gratefully breathing in the fresh night air. At first I could perceive no signs of the watch on duty; not a moving figure was visible, and I crossed over to the port rail to obtain a better view forward. As I stood there, a man descended the ladder from the bridge, entered the chart-house and switched on a light. In the momentary gleam I recognized the face of the second officer, and when he finally came out again, I crossed the deck so as to intercept him.

"Anything going wrong, Mr. Seeley?" I asked. "You have stopped the engines."

He stared at me through the dark, blinded still perhaps by the glare of the chart-room, and unable to recognize my strange voice. Yet he was a yachtsman, trained above all to courtesy.

"Nothing serious, sir," he announced, civilly enough. "The engines are new, and not well adjusted yet; a bit of shaft went wrong, and has to be repaired."

"The captain is on deck?"

"Not now, sir. It was at his orders we heaved to, but he has just gone below. We are out of the trade lines here, and safe enough with a good lookout."

"Are we liable to be lying here for some time then?"

"Five or six hours, the engineer said."

He turned away, but at that instant my eyes caught the flashing of a beacon away off to the southeast.

"What light is that out yonder, Mr. Seeley? We must be well beyond Eaton?"

He glanced in the direction indicated.

"Those white flashes? That is Oldfield Point, sir. Are you acquainted with these waters?"

"Not intimately, although I retain some memory of the charts. I saw merchants' service on the old Atlas Line."

"A fine line that," he acknowledged heartily. "I made my first voyage, as cabin-boy, on the *Mohawk*. You are Mr. Hollis, I presume, sir. I overheard Mr. Carrington tell Captain Turner you were to be one of the party aboard. Well, good night, sir; I must make certain the watch is awake."

He touched his cap courteously, and disappeared beneath the shadow of the bridge, leaving me again alone, undecided whether to return below, or endeavor to walk off my sleeplessness. I scarcely know what idle curiosity led me to stroll along the narrow deck space,

around the cabin to the lounging place at the stern. The rubber deck matting muffled my steps, while the light of the stars along the water surface reflected sufficient light to give me fair view beneath the awning, which had not been rolled up when the guests retired. I stopped suddenly in surprise, staring across at the opposite rail, questioning the evidence of my own eyes. There, clearly outlined in the star-glimmer, was plainly revealed the figure of a woman. Some instinct of fear, or, perchance, a slight sound of approach, must have apprised her of my near presence, for she turned instantly toward me, bending slightly forward, her face visible in the shadow; and then, before I could either move, or speak, she fled along the port rail, vanishing immediately behind the protection of the cabin. I felt sure that her parted lips had uttered a quick exclamation, and her startled effort at escape was sufficient to urge me to pursue. Who could she be? Why was she here on board the *Esmeralda?* above all, why should she be so eager to escape observation?

I ran forward across the deck, and quickly explored the passage between the cabin and rail. It was clearly visible in the bright starlight, but the swiftly fleeing figure had totally vanished. I reached the steps of the companion, and gazed down through the glass doors. The light below revealed nothing, the cabin remained quiet, and deserted. Not a shadow rewarded my search, either on the open deck, or below. Yet surely this was no dream, no hallucination, no mere vision of the night. The woman had actually been there; I had seen her

plainly enough; had even heard the echo of her voice. There was then a woman on board — a woman who sought to hide from observation; who ventured on deck only when she thought it entirely deserted, and who fled in fright from discovery. I even felt a vague impression of her personality — she was young, slender of form, dressed in some shimmering gray stuff, a light, fluffy scarf concealing her hair.

The picture of her grew more clearly defined, as I stood there alone, staring about into the deserted darkness. Strange no one had ever mentioned the presence of any woman aboard. McCann surely did not know, or he would never have told some of his stories; Fosdick was certainly unaware of the fact, for he had expressed to me his relief at a vacation with only men as companions. We had all accepted our invitations with that understanding, not expressed exactly, but plainly implied. Carrington would surely know; it was his yacht. Very well, I would ask him in the morning about the young woman.

There was nothing more to do, then, however, although I prowled about for some time, peering into dark corners, and turning the matter over and over in my mind. Some way the presence of the girl fascinated me; I could not altogether cast aside the memory I possessed of her fleeting figure. She seemed more spectral than real, and yet I felt no longer the vestige of a doubt but what she was flesh and blood. It must have been nearly daybreak before I fell asleep again in my own stateroom, nor did I awaken until the steward

announced the last breakfast call, by a vigorous rapping on my door.

The *Esmeralda* still swung motionless, and I could hear a faint tapping of hammers far below deck, where work was progressing on the recalcitrant machinery. Carrington was seated alone at the table when I entered the cabin, lingering over his coffee, and he remained to keep me company, seemingly in a genial mood in spite of the delay.

"Don't hurry, Hollis," he said, as the waiter brought me grape fruit as a first course. "We have all the time in the world. I suppose you have observed we are lying at anchor?"

"Yes," I answered, not quite ready at that moment to spring the important question. "The stopping of the engine awoke me last night, and I went on deck to learn the cause. Once a sailor, always a sailor, you know. That was soon after midnight, and Mr. Seeley said everything would be fixed right in a few hours."

"There was more damage done than Gault supposed. I had my doubts of those engines. However, we shall be off now in another hour — I was below myself before coming to breakfast."

"No job then your force cannot handle?"

"Oh, no; Gault is a perfectly capable fellow; one of the crank shafts was wrongly adjusted; they are putting it back into place now."

He lit a cigar, and leaned comfortably back in his chair, looking amiably across at me through the blue haze of smoke.

"Rather nice bunch of fellows for a cruise, don't you think?"

"Quite so, although I only knew two previously."

"Yes — Fosdick and McCann. The others are either bankers, or brokers; fellows I meet every day or so in my business, you know. We cut each other's throats on the street, but sometimes it is worth our while to get together. You have never done much in stocks?"

I shook my head.

"My business education was in an entirely different school," I said quietly, ignoring his lead. "My father never speculated."

"I know his feelings on that subject," and Carrington chuckled, as though at a pleasant memory. "Your father was a fine man, Robert, a gentleman of the old school, but a bit Puritanical in his notions. I never advocate speculation myself, but have never shown any qualms of conscience against betting on a sure thing. Perhaps we can discuss this later — before our voyage ends."

"This then is more of a business, than a pleasure trip, sir?"

He laughed, watching the smoke rings rise lazily in the air.

"Well, hardly that, my boy. My hospitality is not to be so strictly limited. However, no doubt, we shall discuss some matters of business importance before our return. We are all more or less interested in the state of the market. By the way, you have some idle money, I hear?"

"Not a large sum at present, although it is true I control some capital."

Carrington pushed back his chair and arose to his feet.

"That is of no immediate importance," he said carelessly. "But in my judgment we are not far away from a great opportunity in finance, when it will pay well to be on the inside. It may interest you to know that a copper pool is being organized."

"I suspected as much; you have some news?"

"Exceedingly important news. Listen, Hollis, this is strictly confidential and worth your thinking it over. Only two men on board know the truth. There will be war in Europe — the biggest war ever known in history — within a month. I base my prediction on dispatches from confidential agents in Berlin, Paris, St. Petersburg, and Vienna. They are in positions to know. Do you realize what that will mean for instance to copper?"

"I can imagine, sir. But if we are on the verge of such a sudden rise in market value, why do you leave New York for a long voyage?"

Carrington smiled, stroking his gray moustache.

"A natural question, perhaps, coming from one not acquainted with my methods," he answered good humoredly. "Because I prefer to be thought out of it. Everybody on the street is aware that I am at sea. I thus escape being interviewed, importuned for information. I am unsuspected of being where I can manipulate the market. I have with me, also, others whose

absence from New York will greatly tend to quiet suspicion."

"Yes, but that is certainly a handicap."

"Not in the least; the *Esmeralda* is equipped with a powerful wireless outfit, and we have on board the most expert operator to be procured in New York. I shall be in direct communication with my office every hour of the day and night. Moreover I have with me men who possess and control millions, and who are smart, shrewd speculators. Tomorrow, once safely beyond Point Judith, I shall explain to them my plan; meanwhile, Hollis, think it over."

He turned toward the stairs, but I stopped him, more deeply interested in something else than in his rather vague financial scheme. The girl on board; was it possible she could have any connection with this affair? At least I would learn if Carrington knew or suspected her presence on board.

"By the way," I spoke with an assumption of carelessness, "Mrs. Carrington, I understand, is at present in Europe?"

"Yes, in Switzerland; I have cabled her that she had better return as far as London at once."

"You seem very confident as to the truth of your advices."

"I am; I know the men who have reported to me."

"I see, and consequently there are no women on board?"

"Women?" he made a swift, expressive gesture. "Certainly not. I wrote you to that effect, I believe;

at least I so instructed my secretary. This voyage is primarily a business affair. Why should you ask that question, Hollis? You have met all my guests."

I hesitated, yet determined to put him fully to the test. If he knew, either his face or manner would betray him, irrespective of his words.

"I imagined I saw a woman on the deck last night, when I ventured out to learn why the engine had stopped. No doubt it was an illusion."

"It surely must have been," his voice evidencing surprise, "for I give you my word there is not a woman on this yacht. I was on board twenty-four hours before we sailed, and kept my eyes open. What, to your mind, did the creature look like?"

"Nothing at all definite, a mere outline in the gleam of the stars. The vision of her vanished before I could approach close enough to assure myself even of her reality. I searched the deck later, but found no trace. It may have been an odd combination of shadow, but, at the time, I felt convinced the vision was actually flesh and blood."

Carrington laughed heartily.

"Dismiss it, my boy," he said, his hand gripping the brass rail. "We may indeed have ghost women on board, but no flesh and blood ones. Better join us on deck, and let the sun and wind clear your brain — perhaps the champagne caused the mischief?"

"Hardly," I answered, adopting his mood, "as I did not touch any. However, I will join you presently."

I watched him disappear through the companion,

stirring my coffee nonchalantly enough. Yet I was not satisfied; Carrington did not know, possessed no suspicion; nevertheless I remained convinced there was a woman on board the *Esmeralda.*

CHAPTER III

I MEET THE MYSTERY

THE repair job required longer than anyone anticipated, as the captain was finally obliged to send a launch ashore to have some welding done, and it was quite late in the afternoon before the boat returned. McCann accompanied the shore party, but the others of us remained on board, amusing ourselves as best we might through a rather hot and tiresome day. Carrington received several messages by wireless, but exhibited no disposition to reveal their contents to his guests, and the shore boat brought back to us the New York morning papers. Although nothing definite in the way of war news had accrued previous to their going to press, the editorials afforded us ample material for discussion, at which I noticed Carrington took no decided stand.

Before the evening meal had ended — the party still lingering in the cosy quarters below over their coffee and cigars — the yacht once again got under way, and steamed slowly eastward down the Sound. Evidently the officers were trying out the newly repaired machinery with some caution, anxious to learn its exact condition before venturing out to sea. It was already dusk when we returned to the deck and resumed card playing beneath the awning, electric lights sparkling

overhead. I took a hand for an hour or more at a table devoted to whist, having Fosdick for a partner, but finally wearying of the game, found a comfortable steamer chair near the rail, and let my thoughts drift idly. The engines moved steadily and we were making better progress, as I could easily perceive from the twinkling lights along the shore. The sky was slightly overcast, the wind from the south, and light. I never recall a softer, sweeter air. The men behind me were again discussing the war news, but their voices scarcely reached my ears. Once I leaned forward, observing the red and green lights of an approaching steamer, as our siren spoke, but was altogether too negligent to cross the deck and watch the stranger pass by.

The fact was, I could not banish entirely from mind the recollection of that woman whom I had seen in this very spot the night before. I had actually seen her — it was no vision, no dream. The reality only became more apparent as I reviewed all the circumstances. Carrington's contemptuous disbelief had left not the slightest impression on my mind. No doubt he had faith in what he said, and possessed no suspicion whatever of her presence on the yacht. But she was here nevertheless — why, how, for what purpose, by whose help, I could not conjecture — but that she actually existed and was hidden somewhere aboard, I had not the slightest doubt, and I must solve the mystery alone. No one else had seen her, no one else would believe my story. Besides, I could not recall a single individual in the company to whom I cared to repeat my sus-

picion. They would take it as a joke — laugh me out of countenance as Carrington had attempted to do. Yet I was unconvinced; satisfied in my own mind that I had not been mistaken.

But how could I prove the vision true? how establish, at least to my own satisfaction, her identity, and purpose? I thought it all over again and again. If Carrington was unaware of her presence — and of this I really no longer felt any doubt — then she must have slipped aboard unseen, or, perchance, aided and abetted by one of the crew. Somewhere below, where discovery was not probable except through accident, she was kept in hiding. There must be vacant staterooms forward — petty officers' quarters — in which she might remain concealed. Yet to accomplish this she would need assistance. She must have had aid in getting aboard unseen; someone who knew of a vacant cabin, and who could supply her with food. Only an officer could hope to do this without arousing suspicion. Except for the engineer, Gault, whom I had not seen, but who was hardly in a situation to render such service, there were three who might be accomplices — the captain, Turner, and the first and second officers — Hatch and Seeley. I dismissed all thought of the first two almost instantly. Turner was an old sea-dog, a former naval officer, unapproachable, and an extremely strict disciplinarian; while Hatch was a tall, lank, slow-spoken individual, never guilty of the slightest civility to any one. Neither of these would ever aid and abet a woman under any conceivable circumstances.

But the second officer, Seeley, was of an altogether different character. He was genial and courteous: not a young man by any means, for his hair was quite gray, yet easy enough to approach — a good seaman, but lacking the education which would enable him to attain command. I remembered Carrington had mentioned the fact that he had been in his employ for over ten years. He was the one most likely to listen to the plea of a woman, and to be deceived by her; and besides, as I suddenly recalled, it was during his watch on the bridge that the girl had ventured on deck seeking the fresh, night air. No doubt she was half-stifled down below, shut in all day, and had emerged from concealment so soon as Seeley informed her the deck was deserted by the passengers. The seamen seldom had any occasion to use the after-deck, and, if such an emergency arose, the officer on watch could very easily warn her of danger. She would be safe enough from observation under shadow of the awning for several hours each night.

Before the party finally broke up I had outlined my plan. I was in no haste to retire, having slept more or less during the afternoon; I would remain alone on deck, and see what happened. The fellows were late enough going below, McCann, and his three bosom friends, lingering about the last card table until after eleven. Finally they dispersed, however, never even noting my presence where I lay, bundled up in a rug in the depths of a steamer chair. Their departure left the after-deck completely deserted and silent, the only

sounds reaching me being the thud of the screw, and the dash of the waters alongside. We were steaming right gallantly now, and stars were finding rifts in the clouds through which to silver the waves of the Sound. Our siren had not blown for an hour, nor did I perceive the lights of any vessel near at hand. The first officer was still on the bridge, but Seeley would relieve him at twelve; there was nothing for me to do but wait until then.

I could better my position, however, and immediately did so. If the second officer really proved to be the accomplice of the girl, he would very probably take a rather careful survey of the deck aft before permitting her to venture forth from concealment. If his search disclosed my presence, the young woman would doubtless be ordered to remain below. My choice of position was easily determined. The flag locker was unusually commodious, as one of Carrington's hobbies was to dress the ship handsomely on every gala occasion, and display the colors of all nations. It was built directly against the after-rail, and back into its protective shadow I silently drew a steamer chair, concealed myself beneath the folds of a rug, and lay there quietly. Except to a careful investigation — which would hardly be made — my presence would never be noticed.

Time dragged, but finally the bell forward announced the hour for the change of watch. I was sailor enough to comprehend the meaning of every sound. I heard someone walk hastily across the main deck, and descend through the companion — a seaman dispatched to call

the second mate. The two came back together, and there was a faint murmur of voices, as though the officers exchanged confidences, ending with the closing of the companion door as Hatch finally retired below. Seeley's voice sang out an order, something to do with one of the boats, and there was a shuffling of bare feet on the deck planks as amidship the watchers responded. The hubbub did not last long, and the men evidently disappeared forward, having completed their task. Five minutes later, with no warning sound of approach, I became aware that someone had quietly rounded the end of the cabin. The mate passed me by within a few feet, so close indeed I could distinguish the buttons on his uniform, and the white cap he wore. Nothing, however, could have occurred to arouse his suspicions, for the man did not even pause in his slow walk, but disappeared along the port rail. Fearing he might return, I remained motionless, yet was doubly assured now that my suspicions were about to be verified. There was a woman concealed on board the *Esmeralda*, and I would soon be able to solve the mystery of her presence.

I listened intently, but could distinguish no sound to guide me. Seeley had probably gone forward again to his post on the bridge, but I dared not venture any exploration. Thus far my plan had worked nicely, and I could not now afford to risk discovery. She came so silently, like a gray shadow gliding out of the night, that she was actually beside the rail, gazing steadfastly out at the silvery water, before I was even clearly aware of her presence. I was scarcely willing to accept

the evidence of my own eyes, yet arose slowly to a sitting posture to observe better, dropping the rug silently onto the deck. She heard no sound of the movement, and, with no suspicion of any other presence near, remained motionless, drinking in the soft beauty of the night, and breathing deeply the crisp salt air. No doubt she felt like a prisoner released from the cell, with no other thought, except the glory of her present liberty.

I could see her plainly, silhouetted against the sky, illumined by the star-gleam which reflected upward from the water, her hands clasped on the rail, her form bent slightly forward, her skirts blowing lightly in the wind. She was slender and young, no doubt as to that, with a certain supple grace to her figure noticeable even in that quiet posture. Beneath the light scarf thrown over her head, a loosened strand of hair fell to the shoulder, so dark in color as to be clearly defined. Surely, whatever else she might prove to be, whatever her purpose was on board, she was no common waif of the New York streets, picked up by Seeley as a companion. She did not belong to his class; nor could there be aught socially in common between them. Some way this knowledge, this intuition, was a positive relief —I was on the trail of no vulgar intrigue, no commonplace romance of the slums. Whatever the cause, the purpose of her adventure, and whatever assistance she had received from the second officer, she was in no way tainted by such a suspicion any longer in my mind.

Helped by the support of the flag locker, I attained

my feet noiselessly, only half determined on the course I had better pursue. However, I was left no choice. Something served to startle her, to make her vaguely aware of some other presence on the deck. She turned, still grasping the rail with one hand, and confronted me. I caught a glimpse of her face, white and youthful, her big eyes staring at me as though in sudden terror. Her lips parted, but gave no utterance to any sound, and, unable to think what was best to say, I merely bowed, and remained silent. She stepped back, then straightened slightly, her questioning eyes never leaving my face.

"I — I supposed myself to be alone," she said, the words uncertain, but the voice clear. "You are one of the passengers?"

"Yes; I chanced to be still on deck when you came."

"Where? You were expecting me?"

I indicated the chair in the shadow, but did not venture to move.

"I was lying there, covered by a rug, but did not see you until you appeared yonder at the rail. Why do you ask if I was expecting you?"

She hesitated just an instant, but answered frankly.

"There was a man here last night, after the engines stopped. I believed then he failed to see me. Was it you, and are you here again tonight to make sure?"

"You have guessed the exact truth," I confessed, almost regretfully. "Last night it was a mere accident, but tonight my presence here had an object."

"Indeed! What interest is it of yours?"

"None directly, except as I am a friend to Mr. Carrington, the owner of this yacht, and also his guest. He assured me only this morning that there was no woman on board, and laughed at me for even imagining such a thing. Naturally I desired to vindicate myself; then besides the mystery also had its attractions."

"No doubt! And now that you have progressed so far, what further do you purpose doing — turn me over to the authorities?"

"I do not know," I said honestly. "But I am in hopes you will trust me enough to explain your object in thus coming uninvited aboard. I should prefer being your friend, if that prove possible."

She did not answer, apparently hesitating in surprise at my unexpected plea, and doubtful as to my sincerity.

"What is your name?"

"Robert Hollis; I live in Chicago."

She nodded, and I imagined the expression of her eyes changed slightly. The merest semblance of a smile curved her lips.

"I am rather glad you are my discoverer," she said quietly, "for I know who you are. You are not altogether a stranger."

"I am not!" I exclaimed in surprise. "Oh! I understand: Seeley has told you of me."

"Has he indeed! Why Seeley?"

"Because I have some reason to believe that the second officer is your special friend on board: that through his aid you have found concealment. Am I altogether wrong?"

"Your theory is certainly ingenious. May I ask in return the reason for such suspicion?"

"First, he is, to my judgment, the only approachable officer on the *Esmeralda:* he is besides the most likely to need money. I have had reason to observe that you venture on deck only during his watch, and tonight, before you appeared, he made a very careful survey of the deck aft, previous to going to the bridge."

"Hardly a careful survey."

"I was concealed, and easily overlooked. So I am going to press you for the truth: Seeley is in your service — is the cause friendship, or money?"

She laughed; the sound barely audible, yet evidence of her swift amusement.

"If I did not chance to know better, Mr. Hollis, I should almost suspect you of being a lawyer," she said cheerfully. "However, in spite of my present position, I am inclined to be a truthful person. I fear Mr. Seeley's interest in me is altogether, or at least largely, mercenary. I will confide in you, and confess that he has already cost me one hundred dollars, and heaven alone knows how much more will be required before we attain deep water, when I hope to be free from bondage."

"Good! I am encouraged; now you will tell me more?"

She shook her head.

"Not another word, sir. So far, as they say in New York, 'you have the goods on me,' and denial would be useless. Of course, I might have told a falsehood. I

am perfectly capable of so doing, and had I been conversing with some others on board, I would have chosen to do so."

"Which would seem to imply that you possess a measure of confidence in me?"

"I do, Mr. Hollis," quietly.

"Seeley must have given me a most excellent reputation, and deserves reward."

"Mr. Seeley gave me your name as one of the passengers, nothing more. I cannot at present explain when, or how, I acquired my information regarding you. To you I am a perfect stranger, and must remain so, but, by some good fortune, I chance to know enough of you to trust you thoroughly as a gentleman. You understand what I mean?"

Her eyes met mine frankly; they were clear, honest eyes, and I felt that I read their direct challenge.

"Perhaps so," I answered with a feeling of disappointment. "You mean I am to ask no further questions? to forget, if possible, your presence on board?"

"Yes: can you do this?"

"Well, to be perfectly frank, I am not altogether certain that I can, or that I ought. I am Mr. Carrington's guest, and owe him a certain loyalty — you admit that?"

"Yes."

"Have I a right to conceal from my host the knowledge which I have discovered, that a strange young woman has been hidden on board his yacht by one of his officers?"

"That must depend altogether on your sense of duty to both Mr. Carrington, and myself," she returned calmly. "Do I appear like a thief? a conspirator? or in any way a desperate character?"

"You appear a most charming young woman, whom I should be very glad to know."

"Thank you," and her lips smiled. "Then my case is not quite hopeless. As a 'most charming young woman' I unreservedly yield myself to your protection. I cannot tell you who I am, nor why I am on board the *Esmeralda* secretly, but I give you my word of honor that no harm shall result from my presence to any of your friends, and I only request you to remain silent for a few hours longer."

"You intend later to reveal yourself to others?"

"As soon as the yacht is safely at sea, beyond all possibility of putting me ashore."

I confess I was puzzled, uncertain; my duty to Carrington seemed clear enough, and yet there was that about the girl which gave me faith in her pledge. She read my hesitation.

"You still doubt me, Mr. Hollis?"

"No, it is not doubt, yet I know so little. You will, at least, trust me with your name?"

Her eyes fell, shadowed by their long lashes. For a moment she looked out across the rail, at the dark water beyond.

"So far as I can — yes," she answered soberly. "You may call me Vera."

CHAPTER IV

WAR, AND A COPPER POOL

"VERA," I echoed, in some way vaguely conscious of a strange familiarity with the word, yet utterly unable to immediately recall the association, "that must be your given, not your family name?"

"And you are not even satisfied at this evidence of my trust?" she questioned lightly. "Usually it is considered quite a compliment to be permitted to call a lady by her given name — yet I grant you, a stranger, this privilege."

"To which I am not insensible: yours is not a common appellative, yet I have known someone so named before."

"Indeed! a friend?"

"Well, really, I cannot say; I haven't quite figured it out yet; only the memory haunts me oddly, as something I ought to remember."

"Or else forget," she interrupted quickly. "What do you say if we blot out all this mystery, and just be natural for a while? I have been alone so long, hiding like a criminal, it will be a wonderful pleasure to converse with someone. Have you the slightest knowledge of where we are, Mr. Hollis? What is that light flashing out yonder?"

I joined her at the rail, looking out across the expanse of water at the distant gleam.

"Montauk Point," I answered, instantly recognizing the peculiar flash. "The eastern extremity of Long Island. We shall be breasting the Atlantic by daylight if all is well. I have good reason to remember Montauk."

"Yes? You were there?"

"Once; why it was sixteen years ago at the close of our war with Spain. I served on the *St. Paul*, and we came up from Cuba loaded with sick and wounded soldiers — Michigan troops mostly — and put them ashore at Montauk. I was little more than a boy then, and the suffering witnessed made a deep impression."

"You were a sailor?"

"I was twelve years at sea: my father was a large shipowner."

"You sailed in his ships?"

"Not altogether; I ran away to make my first voyage, a long one to Australia. Later, when he discovered I could not be weaned from the life, I was given employment on his line, but do not think our relationship ever greatly aided me otherwise."

"But you — you said you lived in Chicago?"

"For some years. I left the sea when I was thirty: I had arisen to command, my father died, and I decided I had had enough. I suppose I seem quite ancient to you?"

"Indeed you do not. I think it is wonderful for you to fight your way like that, when your father was rich.

It was a man's work. Why, Mr. Hollis, I am not a child."

"Is age another of your secrets?"

"Not by any means; I am nineteen — what made you smile?"

"No discourtesy, I assure you; nineteen is an age I am always bound to respect; at nineteen I was third mate on the *Retriever* en route for Bahia, and never since have I felt the importance of life as vividly as I did then."

She looked up into my face questioningly.

"That is not altogether nice of you," she said. "When I permit you to remain and talk with me, you should not make fun. Besides a girl at nineteen, and a boy — they are not the same — are they?"

"Quite different, I should say; although the truth is, Miss Vera, it has never been my privilege to know a great deal about girls."

"I like to hear you say that. Most men I have met pretend to know all about them; then they act and talk like fools. Did you have no sisters?"

"None, or brothers either; I chanced to be the only child. Then I went to sea so early in life I failed to acquire the habit of seeking companionship with your sex. My time of development was passed entirely with men, and, I confess, that afterwards I have never felt quite at home among women. No doubt that explains why I am still a bachelor."

"Tell me about it," she exclaimed eagerly. "Your sea life, I mean."

"Really there is nothing to tell."

"Oh, yes there is: the things one does not read in books. If I was not a girl, I actually believe I should be a sailor — the ocean fascinates me."

"You know it well?"

"Only from two short trips to Europe, and one to the Bahamas; mere pleasure jaunts in summer weather. Tell me about the other side of the picture — the ocean the real sailor knows."

The eagerness of her voice must have touched a responsive chord, for almost before I realized my purpose, I began speaking. Never before did my experiences at sea come back to mind with such vividness; they gave color to my words, while the evident appreciation of the girl, leaning over the rail in the starlight, stimulated my memory. I began at the first, relating my life as cabin boy, and as man-before-the-mast, my first voyage as mate, and the experiences of my earliest command. I told of shipwreck in the South Seas; of a battle for life in the Indian ocean; of strange peoples met in every quarter of the earth; of fighting wintry gales off the Atlantic coast, and the silent desolation of tropic seas. Breathless with interest she questioned me, and I answered, feeling the magic of her eyes on my face, the soft intoxication of her presence beside me. She was natural, wholesome, the very sort of woman I had dreamed about, as being somewhere in the world, yet had never met before. Her very presence was inspiration, but beyond this vague impression my dream did not go. Interested as I was, there seemed to be

between us a barrier of age: I became dimly conscious of the gray hairs which years and responsibility had brought, and knew that all I was confessing could only widen this natural breach between us. How young, even girlish, she appeared, with her smooth, eager face turned toward me in the star-shine. Why, she would be scarcely out of school; or presented in society, if, indeed, she belonged to a set where such presentation was good form. Ay, and where did she belong? what secret purpose had brought her on board? what possible explanation could be offered for her presence? She was not of the submerged tenth, that was plainly evident. Never had I been guilty of drawing social lines tightly, or of fearing to associate with those not of my recognized class. Yet I recognized the real thing; and this girl was accustomed to the best. The evidence was in her manner, her easy air of confidence, the very way in which she wore her clothes. She possessed education, originality, the careless ease which comes of birth, and the surroundings of wealth in childhood. These were not things to be simulated at nineteen; and she was not pretending; she was simply natural. Even as I talked these thoughts filtered through my mind, but, when my story finally ended, we stood in silence, gazing out across the waters. Then I looked aside at her and laughed, realizing suddenly how loquacious I had been.

"Really I must have nearly talked you asleep," I said regretfully. "I do not know when I have before been guilty of such egotism."

"Do not say that. It was most interesting. It is

nice to be spoken to, as though one was an intelligent human being — it is quite an experience."

"Perhaps I do not understand."

"Doubtless not, for you are not a girl, and you tell me you never sought society. The very nature of your life has left you frank, and straightforward. You talk to me just as you would to a man. Most men try to be funny and entertaining, as though I was a baby to be amused. I hate that! I am not so young I cannot think and feel."

"If my frankness has interested you," I ventured, "can you not realize how much I desire to learn more — who you are? why you are here?"

"Of course; but I cannot tell you, Mr. Hollis — not yet."

She looked at her wrist watch, holding it out into a star-gleam, which revealed the white shapeliness of her arm.

"I dare not even remain here with you longer."

"But you will come again? This is not to be our last meeting?"

She hesitated, her eyes meeting mine almost kindly; then she held out her hand.

"The last — yes, in this way. You will meet me again, but not as we have tonight. I have truly enjoyed being with you, of hearing your story, but this meeting here alone was not my choice. You understand I could not avoid it, and after I was discovered, I had to remain and win your pledge to secrecy. You will not forget that?"

"Assuredly not. You will not return to the deck tomorrow night?"

She laughed softly, and withdrew her hand, which I still held.

"Tomorrow night! Oh, I cannot tell; we may be far enough at sea by then so I need no longer seek fresh air by night. I told you my concealment was only temporary. But," and her voice became serious, "if I deem it necessary to continue this masquerade, you would not keep me a prisoner below, I hope?"

"You mean that if I wait for you here, my presence will banish you from the deck?"

"Yes, for that would be an appointment, a prearranged meeting to which I could not consent. It would cost me your respect."

"Never," I protested, "nothing could lead to that. Strange as all this mystery is, I believe your actions justifiable: I do not even ask an explanation."

"You have, indeed, been very kind, very considerate. I cannot thank you enough. Surely you will grant this last request also?"

"That I will not seek you again alone?"

"Yes: but there is no need to repeat the request, you are a gentleman; good night, Mr. Hollis."

The gray dress she wore left upon me the impression that she faded from sight, her dim outline vanished so suddenly amid the shadows. I took a swift step forward, impelled by an irresistible desire to ascertain in what portion of the yacht she found concealment, yet paused almost as quickly. Her last words had been

those of faith, of confidence, and I would be guilty of no act to change her good opinion. She had given me her pledge that her purpose on board had no evil motive; that, within a day or two at most, she would appear openly, and clear up the apparent mystery. I could not front the frank honesty of her eyes, or listen to her voice, without being convinced of her truthfulness. Who she was, and why she had chosen so unconventional a manner of joining us, was beyond my guessing. I essayed many a theory, yet one after the other, all broke down, and left me groping in darkness. Only one fact remained steadfast, to which I could cling with confidence — the girl was no mere adventuress, no criminal; she was doing nothing of which she was in the least ashamed, nor had she the slightest fear of consequences.

The after deck was deserted as I went below and sought my stateroom. In the berth I lay and thought, but to equally poor results. Word by word I reviewed our conversation, endeavoring to recall some expression which might yield me some faint clue. The name, "Vera," haunted me with tantalizing memory, yet I could not bring back from the past its association. Still endeavoring to recall the list of acquaintances in hope of thus touching some spring of recollection, I lost consciousness and slept.

I slept so soundly as to be the last guest at the breakfast table the next morning, although as I sat there alone Fosdick returned from the deck to the cabin, seeking a rain coat, and reporting a heavy fog,

through which the yacht was proceeding slowly. He paused to exchange a few words, resting on the arm of a chair, smoking. The vessel was still within easy view of Montauk, or had been before the mist shut down, but the really important news had come to Carrington by wireless — positive information of the outbreak of war. Russia and France were pitted against Germany and Austria in the death grapple. The German troops had already begun an invasion of Belgium on their drive toward Paris. It was still unknown what course England would take.

The nature of this news obscured all else, and left me unable to complete my meal. Other messages were momentarily expected, and I dressed hastily, and joined the little group on the deck. It was a raw, disagreeable morning, the fog shutting in close about us, an impenetrable curtain, the yacht nosing its way forward with utmost care, its siren wailing out every moment in warning. From the companion I could barely distinguish the outlines of the bridge enveloped in folds of vapor, and overside perceive a narrow lane of frothy water. The air was heavy with moisture, and the passengers on deck were huddled beneath the protection of the awning, their interest in the receipt of news alone keeping them on deck. I joined them just as a cabin boy handed Carrington a new message. He read it, crashing his clinched hand down on the rail.

"It's all over with now," he exclaimed, holding the paper aloft, and gazing about into our eager faces. "England declares war, gentlemen. She will stand by

her treaty with Belgium. Here is our opportunity; listen to me. This is going to be the greatest war in history; every nation in Europe may be involved before it is ended. Do you realize the commodity most in demand? the one metal those armies cannot get along without? It is copper. They must have it, and they must buy it of us. This morning, as soon as I received that first dispatch, I wired my agents to buy, buy, buy. Now, with England in, the result is certain."

He paused, and studied the faces in the group.

"Gentlemen, there is wealth enough here on this yacht to control the entire copper output, if we work swiftly. The profit will be enormous. I have the campaign all mapped out; I know where to buy, and my agents are ready to execute my orders. I am going to say to you frankly that I had this thought in mind when I first organized this cruise. I invited you to join me very largely because of what you represent in the business world. I believed this crisis was approaching, and prepared for it. I wanted you men together, away from every other influence, where you could make quick decision. Our very absence from New York, which has been widely advertised, will tend to allay all possible suspicion that we are influencing the market. By wireless we can operate surely and secretly, with no possible fear of betrayal. The only question is, are you ready to back me up?"

The expressions on the faces of those gathered about him reflected the varied characters of the men. They were alike startled by the unexpected turn of affairs,

yet financial greed evidently predominated. Even the one German in the group had seemingly forgotten his nationality in view of the golden bait dangling so temptingly before his eyes. Fosdick, actuated by his lawyer instincts, and still cool, and calculating, was first to question the proposition.

"You are perfectly assured of being able to control the market?" he asked.

"I already practically control," returned Carrington confidently. "With a little more capital the game is certain. My agents have everything buyable located, and a price put on it. All I need do is order the deals closed. In twelve hours, gentlemen, we can have the copper situation entirely in our hands. Here are my holdings individually. This morning, by wireless, I acquired options on twenty-five per cent more. I need your help to close the deal."

They bent over the papers, eager to grasp the truth, but abundantly satisfied with a quick glance at the magic figures. It was evidently enough a master stroke, a business deal easy to comprehend, and all that remained for them to do was to take their profits.

"You — you return immediately to New York?" questioned McCann, his lips trembling.

"Certainly not; our game at present is to keep out of sight; permit no one to discover who is behind the movement. Your personal checks will satisfy me. I propose holding the yacht, say a hundred miles from shore, and conduct the entire business by wireless. That makes it safe and sure."

The group of financiers stared at each other, one waiting for the next to voice decision. Fosdick, as usual, took the initiative.

"I'm heartily with you, Carrington," he said frankly, "you can count on my check for $100,000 right now."

"And I," "and I," echoed from lip to lip. "It looks like mighty easy money," added McCann, "and I need a little."

Carrington smiling pleasantly, turned toward me.

"And how about you, Hollis? Coming in with us? We ought to have one Chicago representative, you know."

I shook my head, doubting my ability to produce the amount required off-hand.

"Not today; give me a few hours to think it over. I should like to talk with you privately first."

"All right; we shall have enough without you, but I'll hold the chance open until you do decide. Let's adjourn to the cabin, gentlemen, where you can draw your checks while the steward opens a few bottles. This is an occasion to be celebrated."

We were upon our feet, not unwilling to escape from the raw air, when the voice of the lookout sounded muffled, but distinct, far forward.

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" echoed the bridge.

"Off the starboard bow, sir — a big one."

We gathered at the rail staring out blankly into the smother. Then suddenly the mist seemed to roll asunder as though cut by a knife, and there in the rift, as

if the fog was a frame, appeared one of the finest sea pictures I ever remember seeing. A huge iron warship, her funnels belching smoke at full speed, the white spray racing along her sides, swept into view. We had a glimpse of the black muzzles of guns protruding from forward and after-turrets, of groups of sailors on deck, and in the fighting tops; a white-clad officer leaned over the bridge-rail. There was no flag; nor did we need one to know for what she stood. It was the vision of an instant; then the fog closed down between us, and the speeding monster was gone. Carrington pointed out into the blank mist.

"There goes one of your bulldogs now," he said. "That fellow has his orders already. In five hours more not a German liner will dare leave New York."

CHAPTER V

THE WRECK OF THE "ESMERALDA"

WE passed the greater part of the day below, and long before night came, a heavy, sweeping rain set in and kept us there. I never recalled a more blinding, disagreeable storm at this season of the year, and in those waters, although there was very little wind or sea accompanying it. The smother however made it safer to proceed at half-speed, and the lookouts forward were doubled. Every time I ventured to peer through the glass of the companion I distinguished the burly form of Captain Turner on the bridge, his oilskins glistening with moisture.

It seemed a long evening, as I was in no spirit for cards, and discussion was altogether about the war, and the projected copper pool. Carrington received several messages in further proof that the affair was already well under way, but he made no other attempt to arouse my interest. I had no expectation that the girl would venture on deck in face of the storm raging, but her pledge to make her presence known to those on board so soon as we were safely at sea, kept me up until a late hour. The possibility of her sudden appearance, and explanation, rendered me nervous, and sleepless, but my watchfulness brought no reward. By ten-thirty I had retired to my stateroom, as I decided that

it was useless to wait any longer. Yet even there, and when partly disrobed, a temptation to explore the decks again assailed me. I unscrewed the port and glanced out, the cold rain driving hard against my face. Nothing could be seen; I stared into an impenetrable black wall. There was evidently nothing to do but remain where I was, and I closed the port and lay down in the berth.

I had passed too many black nights at sea to be kept awake by any haunting fear of possible accident. There would be watchful eyes aboard, on bridge and forecastle, and there was no storm, merely a quiet surge of waters, through which we were steaming slowly. To be sure, by now the *Esmeralda* must be close within the ordinary track of the great liners bound for northern Europe, and the thought of collision occurred to me, but was as instantly dismissed. Yet I remained restless, and it must have been considerably after midnight when I finally fell asleep.

I do not know what aroused me, but I sat up suddenly, wide-awake, a strange ill-defined fear clutching at my heart. What was it I had heard? a cry? a blow on the deck above? had I really heard anything, or was it merely the echo of a dream? The stateroom was dark as Erebus, but I got my feet over the edge of the berth, and switched on the electric light. Even as I stood thus, my hand still on the switch, someone ran swiftly across the deck directly overhead, and a voice wavered out:

"Port, sir! Hard-a-port — my God!"

There was a startling crash forward, the awful sound of crushing iron, and splintered timbers. I was flung headlong against the partition, barely saving myself by outstretched hands, but falling bruised and helpless to the deck. The electric flashed out instantly, but a dull gleam from without streamed through the glass of the port. It was a ghastly green light, and I recognized it at once as the port lantern of the ship which had rammed us. Before I could get to my feet even, still dazed and trembling from the shock, the ghastly green radiance began to recede. Rage took the place of fear —the damn murderer was backing off! was leaving us to sink! I clawed my way across the stateroom, seeking to gain view without, but could perceive little. The glass was dimmed with moisture, and through it I could see merely the circle of green light revealing the outline of a high bow. No other gleam was visible but above me a man cursed hoarsely, and then screamed out some order, which I could not distinguish.

All this was the work of an instant. What had occurred was as clear to my mind as though I had actually witnessed the scene from the deck above. A great steel steamer, a tramp, no doubt, from its darkened decks, had plunged out of the blackness, and rammed her bow straight into us. The contact must have been well forward, near the bridge. We were going down by the head; already I could perceive the list, the deck under foot was tilting; the engines had ceased to throb, as though the inflow of water had reached the boilers. Feet scrambled along the deck,

over head voices yelled, and I could hear the creaking of boat tackle.

Working desperately in the dark, scarcely able by now to keep feet on the slanting planks, I hastily drew on what bits of clothing I could find at hand, and felt my way blindly to the door. It was jammed, but I kicked it open, and stumbled forth into the main cabin, clinging to the door frame in order to retain my feet. A smoking lantern swung to a beam, throwing a dim glow over the interior, revealing a scene of utter wreck. Everything had been wrenched loose, and flung forward — chairs, books, piano, hurled against the bulkhead, and blocking the stairs. The bookcase had toppled over, the shattered glass of its doors strewing the deck, and, just beyond, lay the dead body of the steward, the whole back of his head crushed in, his white jacket ghastly with the stain of blood. Beyond, half way up the stairs, his face hidden from view in his arms, lay another man, clad in pajamas. The stateroom doors stood wide open, but no living being was visible. All who survived that first shock must have fled to the deck in mad struggle to escape. Ay, and there was desperate need for me to join them. The *Esmeralda* was going down; already her forward hold was filled with water, the bulkheads alone keeping her afloat; once they gave way, she would sink like a stone.

I crossed the cabin on hands and knees, clawing my way desperately through the litter until I attained the stairs. These no longer led up, but forward. Beyond was utter blackness, silence; and through the shattered

door drops of rain splashed. I had to creep over the dead body, and caught a glimpse of the man's face, scarcely recognizable in the dim light: the short gray beard alone gave me certainty he was a banker named Case. I had played cards with him a few hours before, but he was dead now — I made sure of that, although there was no visible mark on him. I remember all this; the picture of that cabin, with all its horrors, is as clear before me as though etched, and yet I crept through it dazed, and scarcely comprehending my actions.

It was not until I had made my way to the outer deck, and felt the night air and rain on my face, that I truly awoke to the danger. The tilt of the yacht forward was so sharp, I dare not release my grasp of the rail. I could scarcely see anything; not a light burned, not even a distant star glimmered; the driving rain blinded me, and soaked through my shirt to the skin. The only thing I could perceive, shading my eyes as I stared, was a green light showing far away to the right, the reflection of which barely revealed our starboard rail crushed and splintered, and masses of water already surging aft of the main hatch. It was a sight to take the heart out of any man; the gloom, the silence, the death clutch of those waves almost at the companion, the sharp slope of the yacht's deck, the dead, sodden feeling under foot. I scarcely dared move, for to release my grip was to slide down into the black water, into the riffle of spars and ropes forward. It was all horror and death that way, but from aft, under the awning, a sound of ex-

cited voices reached my ears, and the rasp of boat tackle. No doubt all on board, who lived, were there, seeking to escape. They had sprung for the open deck at the first alarm, not even waiting to dress, and, if I would join them, there was not an instant to lose. The after bulkhead could not hold long; any moment, any unusual roll of the sea, would rend it asunder, and the *Esmeralda* would sink. Life hung on seconds; nor would those frightened wretches wait to learn the fate of any others aboard.

Clinging to every projection of the cabin, I attained the port rail. The stanchions formed a species of ladder by means of which I could clamber aft, but, even as I attempted the first step, a voice called to me from out the black depths below, and I hung there, staring behind me, unable to perceive a thing, excepting a litter of tangled wreckage.

"Don't leave me! give me a hand."

"Who are you?"

"McCann; you are Hollis, ain't you?"

"Yes; are you hurt?"

"No; bruised a bit, no doubt; my foot is caught under a spar."

"Alone?"

"The second mate fell with me; he's down below — dead, I guess."

It was no small job getting to him, using the slippery rail for a ladder, and I was knee deep in water when I finally found foothold in the riffle, and rolled the spar off the imprisoned limb. He was lying flat on

the deck, his head barely free of the waves, but was able to clutch the nearest stanchion and haul himself up to the protection of the rail. His face was but a blurred outline, although I could perceive the glimmer of a white shirt. I stared beyond him into the black silence.

"You say Seeley is down there?"

"I fell on top of him," the words scarcely audible. "He was trying to get into the cabin, when he lost his grip. I tried to catch him, and he took me along. Say," he was breathing hard, "do you know if there was a girl on board?"

"Yes, there is. I met her night before last on deck. Seeley was trying to reach the cabin, you say? He was endeavoring to save her?"

"Ay; I only got a word of it. By God, I thought the fellow had gone mad! Who is she?"

"I do not know; but never mind who she is. Did Seeley tell you where she was hidden?"

"In a storeroom, next to the steward's pantry; he said the door was locked."

Desperate as our own situation was, all thought of personal danger left me in sudden realization of the awful horror fronting her, almost under our very feet. I could picture the darkness, the swash of the water, the helpless beating against the locked door. I gripped McCann by the arm.

"We must get her out of there," I cried. "Come on with me."

"Where? down — down there?"

"Yes, of course: you are a man, I take it. The lantern is still burning, and we have a chance. If the yacht goes down we might as well be below decks as up here. Come now, wake up, McCann — we are Americans, and it is women first, you know."

If he was a coward he had no wish to let it be known, although the suddenness of disaster had broken his nerve. The words spoken, the tone of my voice, touched his pride, his real manhood.

"Ay, you're right, Hollis," he said heartily, and the grip of his hand tightened. "I'm no seaman; I hate the sea, but no one ever called a McCann a quitter. I'll go as far as you, and we'll get that girl out, or drown together."

I was climbing the rail before he finished, reckless of all else except the task confronting us. There was a sturdy ring to the man's utterance which yielded me new courage. I had found a comrade upon whom to rely. He was following me inch by inch, fighting for hold along the stanchions, every nerve and muscle braced for the effort. Yet, had he not responded, just the same I should have gone on alone. The face of the girl whose hand I had held in mine under the light of the stars, seemed to rise before me, her eyes pleading for help. The vision urged me forward. I know not what strength, or skill, enabled me to swing from the rail and grip the cabin front, but I hung there with one hand, my feet finding slight support on the slippery slope of the deck, and reaching back gave McCann support, while he also made desperate passage to the safety

of the companion. An instant later I was beside him, and we crept together down the inverted stairs.

The frightfulness of our position became more evident as we advanced. The dead bodies, the smashed furniture, the horrid swaying of the hulk beneath us, suspended, we had to use the forward wall as a floor, crawling through the litter, made us feel that certain death must end the adventure. The steward's body had slid forward, and I crept past so closely I could scarcely escape touching the dead face. There was a hook in the deck below — for what purpose it had been placed there I do not know — but it gave me foothold, enabling me to kneel.

"Here McCann, climb to my shoulders," I ordered, "and take down the lantern. Quick now, I'll hold you all right."

His face was ghastly, and he obeyed as though he moved in his sleep. Every muscle in me felt the strain, but I held him, straightening out my body, and balancing myself, until his uplifted hands gripped the light.

"Have you got it?"

"Yes; let me down slowly."

"All right; hang on to it for your life — now."

My arms gave under the strain, and a sudden surge of the sodden wreck, but he held to an end of the overturned piano, the light still burning feebly, threatening every instant to flicker out. I caught and steadied it, turning up the wick, and casting the faint glimmer along the passage leading to the steward's pantry. I

had never been beyond those swinging doors, which now stood wide open because of the position of the vessel, but I realized clearly enough what the probable arrangement would be. This was a pleasure yacht, and next to the pantry would come the officers' quarters, the steward and waiters bunking opposite. Doubtless there would be some entrance forward, as the captain was the only one ever seen in the main cabin, but if so it would be through the bulkhead, which was now tightly closed, and which now alone held the vessel swinging like a pendulum, scarce a third out of water. If my theory was right, and it must be, then the woman would still be alive, a helpless prisoner, yet still living. But how we were ever to get to her, down that sheer cliff of deck, was as desperate a problem as ever I fronted. Nor was there time for ingenuity to discover a way. I could hear a lapping of water, the groaning of wood, and once, far away, the muffled voice of some one shouting. McCann was breathing heavily, and his eyes meeting mine were vacant of thought, filled with terror. If he would be of any real use I must arouse him, give him work to do.

"You are safe enough," I began sharply. "That piano can't fall; you kick those chairs out — yes, down the passage; they will catch somewhere and give us foothold. Good! can you reach the edge of that rug? Brace yourself, and haul it loose; now pull, man! this is life or death. Fasten it through the hinge there — no, pull it through, and tie a knot. Lie down to it — I'll hold your foot; that's it! Now let me pass, and you follow."

I slipped down, gripping the rug with one hand, the other clinging to the lantern, the dim, smoky glow of which made the passage visible. The pantry door stood open; indeed, I doubt if it had a door, but everything else was closed. I could not see the end of the passage, but sufficient water had already either seeped through the bulkhead, or found entrance through an open port, to flood the lower portion. I could see the glimmer within a few feet of me, and hear it swash back and forth as the sodden hulk rolled. Two of the chairs which McCann had kicked loose in the cabin above, had lodged in the doorway below. How firmly they were caught could not be determined, but I must take the risk that they would sustain my weight, for I had reached the end of the rug. McCann was just above me, and I sung out to him to hold fast; then, the lantern wire gripped in my teeth, I lowered myself the full length of my arms. This brought the water to my knees, while the lodged chairs were a foot or two below. As I hung there, dreading the plunge, my eyes were directed opposite the pantry, and the gleam of the lantern glittered on the blade of a hatchet just inside the door. Never was a tool more welcome.

"Hold tight above there," I managed to ejaculate through closed lips.

"What are you going to do?"

"Swing in toward the door on the right — there is a hatchet lying there."

The rug would hold! I had no doubt of that, for it was strongly woven, and the knot could never pull

through the hinge. With feet braced against the opposite wall I forced my way across, making three efforts before my fingers finally gripped the hatchet handle. Clinging with one hand I thrust the tool into my belt, fully prepared now to let go.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESCUE OF VERA

"TAKE this lantern, McCann," I called, and held it up to him, "I'll need both my hands free. Hold it as low as possible. Now, here goes!"

I did not pray audibly, but a prayer was in my heart, as I released my grip on the rug and took the plunge. The first chair crumpled beneath my weight, but by good luck the second held just long enough to enable me to grip the latch of the door and cling tight. The slant of the deck gave one groping foot precarious purchase on the threshold, although water swept nearly to my waist, and for a moment I tottered there, helpless to do more than merely sustain my position. The noise made by this struggle must have been heard within, for I became aware of water splashing, and a fist pounded the door.

"Help! is that you Mr. Seeley?"

"No," I answered, nerved to new effort by the sound of her voice, and the knowledge that I had indeed located the right spot, and found her still alive. "This is Hollis. Is the door locked?"

"Yes, Mr. Seeley has the key; you must be quick — the water is already above my waist."

"No time for keys then," I said. "Stand back until

I cut a way in. Throw your light down, McCann — ay, that's better!"

The latch of the door was forward; I could cling to it, and have my right hand free with which to wield the hatchet, keeping both feet wedged on the threshold. The light was the merest glimmer, yet sufficient to reveal the paneling of the door, and I hacked at this fiercely, exerting the full strength of my arm. Whatever the wood might have been, it was no light pine. A dozen blows, however, splintered the upper panel, and then I sent the keen blade crashing downward, gouging out great chunks, and splinters, until a jagged passage had been made, sufficiently large for the passage of a body. I could see nothing within; the darkness was intense, and the girl must have drawn back to escape injury, and hence was invisible. The water was deeper in the cabin than in the passage without, and now came pouring forth through the opening, drenching me nearly to the arm-pits. McCann called in warning, his voice cracked with a terror he could no longer control.

"Wait; I'll be there in a minute!" I shouted back, my only fear lest he desert us. The bulkhead still held; this torrent was water which had found other entrance; no doubt it would eventually increase in volume, and sink the vessel, yet there was still ample time for us to escape. There would be no sudden plunge while that bulkhead held.

"Are you all right, Miss Vera?" I asked anxiously. "Where are you? Can you see me?"

"Yes; I am clinging to the berth." Her voice was

excited, but clear. "The water is up to my shoulders. Is the opening sufficient?"

"For you I think, if you can make it alone. I should have to knock out another panel to get through myself."

"There is no time for that, and no need. I'm coming now: watch out."

Our two bodies so obscured the faint glow of the lantern dangling from McCann's hand above, that I could see nothing, yet I managed to grapple her arm, and thus assist in dragging her into the jagged opening. The water, surging to the sodden roll of the doomed yacht, and now dammed by her body, poured over us both in suffocating volume, but the struggle was only for a moment, and then I had the girl safely clasped in my arms, her head elevated well above the receding flood.

"Now, grasp the rug," I ordered, as I thrust her light form upward. "It will help you creep up the slope of the deck. Creep on back, McCann, with the lantern; never mind me — I'll find a way out."

She possessed sufficient nerve and strength for the effort. There was no hesitancy, no word of protest. Silently, inch by inch, she fought her way aft, her feet slipping on the wet planks, but her fingers gripping desperately at the sustaining cloth. I could see only the outline of her revealed against the gleam of the lantern, as McCann clambered upward in advance. My struggle was to keep my own feet in that torrent of water; it was deepening rapidly, and there seemed to be a more violent surge to the hull as though the sea with-

out was growing disturbed. I could hear the groaning of the bulkhead to the strain, and realized that the timbers could not long hold against the immense weight. I could perceive nothing, save the faint radius of light above, now nearly obscured by the two forms creeping upward; and the water, surging back and forth from wall to wall, already slapped me in the face. Yet I clung there, my hand gripping the jagged edge of the hole in the door, my feet still firmly planted on the sill, until assured both the others had attained the after cabin safely. Then I sprang for the lower end of the rug, and went up, hand over hand, reckless of the strain, my one desire to get out of that black hole again into the open air. Suddenly the fear had come into my heart; not until then had I paused to think — effort had obscured all conception of danger; but waiting there in that black hell, the creaking of timbers in my ears, the water clutching at my throat, the full horror of it overwhelmed me with sudden terror. My God! Surely we could not have accomplished all this, and still be doomed to die like rats in a hole. At least we must reach the open deck, and have a chance to fight for life under the stars.

Yet, once I had attained the cabin, all this left me. Ghastly as the wreck of that interior appeared, the wider space brought back to me the seaman's courage. There was hope yet, an opportunity to fight. McCann had dropped the lantern on the overturned piano, and was urging the girl forward toward the stairs. Terror made him oblivious to everything except a mad desire

to escape, but she was glancing back, as though in search for me. I clambered to my knees amid the litter of furniture, and snatched up the light barely in time to keep it from smashing on the deck.

"I am all right," I called confidently. "Get outside both of you as quick as you can."

Never in all my life have I experienced the same sense of relief as when I stumbled out of that companion onto the open deck, and felt the night air in my nostrils; yet not until then did my brain truly grasp the desperate nature of our situation. Below, fighting fiercely for her life, my whole attention had been centered on the one object, but now the whole horror lay outspread before me in all its hideous details. The gleam of the lantern revealed the sharp slope of the deck, and the surge of water churning from rail to rail scarce a dozen feet away; the riffle of tangled spars and ropes to port under which I knew lay dead bodies; the smashed bulwarks, and a wrecked small boat hanging stern down from a davit, with a man's arm and head dangling. All about us the night and sea was black as ink — not a glow anywhere except a single white gleam far away to starboard like a distant star. It was not a star — it was far too close to the horizon — beyond doubt it was a masthead light on the steel monster which had run us down.

I held the lantern behind my body, and stared out through the void at the faraway spark — it was no more than a pin prick, barely visible across miles of open water, and growing fainter each second. I read

the whole meaning, despair clutching my heart. The vessel had waited and picked up the *Esmeralda's* boats; believing she then had on board all who lived, she had resumed her voyage. A mail boat, no doubt, running on schedule, every minute of delay meant loss to the owners, and the captain would never lie by until morning. Supposing he had rescued all lives,' he cared nothing for the sinking hulk. We were alone, deserted, in the midst of the dead, possibly without even a chance to save ourselves from going down with the sodden wreck.

But if there should be a chance there remained not an instant to lose. I flashed the light about into the face of McCann and the girl, the man white and haggard, his eyes as dull as though he had taken an opiate, absolutely stupefied with fear. The fellow was no coward in a way; I knew that, for I had heard tales of his adventures; but this was a peril so sudden, so strange, as to fairly paralyze his faculties. He would do whatever I told him, but was utterly incapable of original effort. But the girl! In the gleam of the lantern her eyes met mine, full of questioning, but fearless. She must have seen, and understood also, for she called to me, clinging to the rail to keep her footing, her loosened hair flapping in the wind.

"They are leaving us, Mr. Hollis? Is not that the steamer out there?"

"Ay, the last glimpse we'll ever have of her," I answered bitterly, forgetting myself in anger. "The damn brutes think more of a few dollars than our lives.

But we'll make a fight just the same. Come, wake up McCann! aft with you — oh, yes you can; crawl along the rail; once beyond the cabin there's good foothold. Now, my lady, I'll not let you fall — good! you are the better sailor of the two."

I held the lantern in my teeth, and clambered after them. It was a thirty foot climb, but the rail stanchions made a fair ladder, giving good hand and foothold, although occasionally the hulk beneath us rolled so heavily in the sea as to bring us to a pause, clinging grimly to the tarred rope in order to retain our balance. Twice I thought the doomed yacht was actually going down, as under the blow of some swell she leaned heavily to starboard, giving glimpse of the black water just below where we clung so desperately. Yet with sodden, sickening motion, like the last painful effort of a dying creature, she managed to right herself once more, every timber groaning in agony, the salt spume of the sea blown into our faces. The wind was not high, nor the sea violent; had they been, I doubt if the yacht would have survived this long, the only motion being the comb of the long Atlantic rollers striking us on the port quarter, lifting us helplessly to their crest, and then dropping us into the hollow as though rocked in a cradle.

Once beyond the over-reach on the cabin we found opportunity to stand erect, gripping the iron supports which had sustained the awning above the after deck. In the dim rays of the lantern the scene was one of utter wreck and desolation. A boom of the mizzen mast had

fallen from aloft ripping the awning into shreds, twisting the iron work, and splintering the rail aft. Tables and chairs, broken and entangled, lay piled in a heap against the after-hang of the cabin, while rope ends littered the deck, and hung dangling like so many serpents. There had been four boats hung in davits above the rails; two of them were gone; one hung trailing overboard, half submerged, with the bow still swinging to the tackle; the fourth had been smashed into kindling. I staggered across to where I could look down at the dangling craft, holding my lantern out over the rail. It was broken amidships and useless, but jammed under a thwart, lay a man's body; the gleam of light rested on the upturned face, and I recognized with horror the features of Fosdick.

Sickened, covering my eyes with one arm, I clung to the shattered rail, completely unnerved. The struggle to control myself, to get a new grip, could not have lasted a moment. The voice of the girl aroused me, brought me back instantly to manhood.

"Mr. Hollis, the dory is still here!"

I swept the lantern about, confused, and unable to locate the sound. McCann was crouching against the cabin, but the woman aided by the flag locker, had crept aft, and now leaned out over the stern rail and was pointing eagerly down into the black water. I worked my way cautiously forward to where she clung, the lantern swung overside, its small ring of light giving me view of the whole uptilted stern. The water within the yacht must have been steadily rising, for we were

already so deeply submerged that only the upper half of the screw was visible, together with a small section of the rudder. The dory, which had evidently been left trailing astern, was actually afloat, although half filled, and her oars, jammed securely under a thwart, were still in place.

The position of the vessel, the water-logged condition of the smaller craft, told me at a glance the whole story. What was left of the crew of the *Esmeralda*, together with those guests who had lived to attain the deck, had made their escape in the two missing boats — they would hold twenty each, and were strong and seaworthy. No doubt the smashed one there had been lowered first, but the tackle jammed, and in the wreck Fosdick had been killed. The others had clambered aboard the two left, leaving him crushed behind. They had no need of the dory, which at that time was in all probability perched high and dry on the uptilted stern, where launching was impossible. Since then the yacht had been steadily sinking; had, perhaps, assumed a different position as it thus became more deeply submerged. The light dory, still held fast by its painter, had slid down the wet planks back into the sea, shipping some water as it came down stern on, but remaining buoyant enough to remain afloat. So far as I could perceive not a seam was opened, and every ounce of water had swept in over the gun-wales.

The sight of the little craft, staunch and buoyant, bobbing about just below us in the glow of light, brought back my courage. Ay, there was a chance here; we

could get free of the doomed yacht; we were not to perish like drowning rats, helplessly. To be sure the boat was a small one, a mere dinghy intended for use in smooth waters; why they had continued trailing it astern so far at sea was a mystery; yet it would bear the three of us unless a storm arose. There was no time to seek either blankets, or provisions, nor was there any fresh water to be had — but at least, we need not go down with the ship. We had still a hope of rescue, a fighting chance — God be thanked for that!

My hand closed over hers as she clung to the rail, and she turned and looked at me. Never in any eyes have I seen such glimpse of steady courage.

"The boat is strong, staunch; she will carry us, Mr. Hollis?"

"Ay! this is better than I dared hope. But there is no time to lose; the yacht is settling fast — see those bubbles of air! why I can almost feel the droop of the planks beneath my feet. Here, McCann, bear a hand! Pull yourself up by that flag locker; now get a grip here. Are you sailor enough to slide down that rope?"

He stared at the boat, bobbing up and down on the black water, with lack-luster eyes.

"It — it will sink," he half sobbed, "it — it is almost full of water."

"Sink nothing!" my disgust rising beyond control. "It will hold twice your weight. Down with you, and bail. Then stand by to help the lady. Over you go my lad, if I have to pitch you headlong; this is no time to argue the matter. Will you try it, quietly?"

"What's the matter with your going?"

"Because I stay to help the girl, and cast off. We cannot afford to lose that line. Good God, man, our lives are at stake! I doubt if this vessel stays above water three minutes longer. Now, damn you, either crawl over that rail, or I'll throw you."

He chose the least of the two evils, for my hands were at his throat. I helped him scramble to where he could grip the rope, to which he clung with all the terror of a big baby, but there was no stopping now. He stared up into my face, but his fear of me must have been greater than of the lapping water below, for the strands of the rope slipped through his fingers and an instant later he had clambered into the bow of the boat, and sank onto his knees in the water. To my relief the dory did not sink greatly beneath his weight, the water shipped proving scarcely ankle deep. It would support the three of us without bailing. The yacht rolled to starboard, fairly burying her rail. I thought she would never rise again, and my arms clasped the girl to hold her steady. Then the hulk rose slowly, painfully, like a giant struggling for one last breath. No words can describe the dead, sodden feeling of the sinking hulk under us.

CHAPTER VII

ADRIFT IN THE BOAT

TO cling there longer, to delay another moment, would be suicide. I leaned far over and looked down at the dinghy now rising and falling on the swell caused by the plunge of the yacht. McCann was upon his knees clinging to the gunwales, his face turned upward pleadingly toward the light.

"Catch this lantern, McCann," I called down to him sharply. "I will swing it to you on the end of a rope. Easy, man! now throw off the lashing, and make the glim secure on the thwart behind you: better tie it to the lock. Good; you'll make a sailor yet. Now listen; work your boat over until you can get a grip on the rudder chains, and hold her steady — yes, to your right; use one of the oars. Now hang on — I'm going to send the lady down; stand by to give her a hand."

He did as I bade him in a fashion, but was so awkward about it, I wondered the boat kept upright. A little extra water was shipped, but finally the position sought was attained, and the towline brought taut. Satisfied, I glanced aside at my silent companion.

"Not a very easy gangway, but the best we have. Are you afraid?"

She smiled.

"Not in the least, Mr. Hollis; these skirts are a

nuisance, but I can climb like a boy. Help me keep my balance on the rail."

She was over so quickly I can scarcely recall more than clasping her arm, and she went down the rope hand over hand, as lightly as a sailor. By the time she reached the boat, her body was half submerged in the water, but McCann gave her his hand, and assisted in dragging her in over the side. No sooner was she safe within than she looked back, shading her eyes from the light to perceive me leaning anxiously over the rail above.

"I am all right, Mr. Hollis," she called in her clear, steady voice. "Now you come — come quick!"

"Just a second more," I answered. "Here is the line; haul it in. Get out your oars, McCann, and pull. Don't wait, or you'll be sucked down when the yacht sinks. Never mind me; I'll jump from the rail, and swim out to you."

I climbed onto the rail, gripping an iron stanchion for support, and poised myself for the plunge. The boat, surrounded by its little circle of light, drifted away, McCann awkwardly struggling with the heavy oars. The lantern rays fell full on the girl's upturned face, and once she held out her hands in pleading gesture. It could scarcely have been a minute I hesitated, yet suddenly beneath me came a sound of rending wood, a muffled explosion, and the deck reeled as though burst asunder. I leaped straight outward, and went splashing down into the sea.

I must have sunk deeply, for I felt no swirl of the

waters, no suction, but when I came again to the surface, nothing was visible but that bobbing lantern on the dinghy. The *Esmeralda* had disappeared. A faint cry reached me, and I answered it, striking out strongly toward the guiding light. Five minutes later, dripping and a bit exhausted — for I had been ashore a long while — I managed to clamber in over the stern. Even as I rested breathless on a thwart, I realized that the girl had crept aft, and her hands sought mine.

"Oh, I am so glad," she sobbed, almost hysterically. "I was afraid; I — I thought you went down with the yacht."

"No such luck. I jumped just as her decks blew up. Is there anything in sight?"

"I — I haven't looked; but there is no sound, no light anywhere. Do you suppose the steamer has really left us?"

"I have no doubt of it," I answered, but stood up so as to see about more clearly. "They supposed all who lived had been picked up, and then continued on their course."

My eyes ranged the horizon, but found nothing. To the eastward, as I supposed the direction to be, there hung a dark, vapor-like cloud obscuring the stars, and beneath this curtain the strange steamer had vanished, not even a distant gleam of light showing. We were alone on the great ocean in the grasp of the black night. I sat down again dazed for the instant by the immensity of the waters, the utter loneliness, and the sudden realization of the littleness of this cockle-shell in which we

floated. Her voice aroused me to a comprehension that I alone was a sailor, and that on me depended every chance for life.

"Do you know, Mr. Hollis, where we are?"

"Not exactly. I heard the Captain state the position of the yacht yesterday at noon, about one hundred and fifty miles east and south of Montauk; we have drifted some since."

"In what direction?"

"North, I should say, from what I know of the currents hereabout."

She drew a quick breath.

"Are we in the steamer lanes?"

"Not of the North Atlantic liners; they would pass, farther eastward. I cannot imagine what that fellow who rammed us was doing up in here so far out of his course. Yes, that was a liner; I could see the lights of her ports. The only vessels passing along here will be coasters, or, by luck, possibly some tramp bound Boston way."

Unsatisfactory as all this was, bringing to me afresh the desperate peril of our situation, it yet compelled me to exert authority, and seek to divert the minds of the others by action. We must make a fight — the best fight possible — and in this it was my province to lead.

"McCann," I said, "there is little use tugging away at those oars, when we even do not know the points of the compass. Hand one back here, so I can keep the boat's head straight, and then ship the other. Now let's see what is on board; try the locker forward; and Miss

Vera, you might examine beneath the stern sheet. This boat has never been inboard since we sailed."

They went at the task as though glad of the opportunity, McCann creeping forward on hands and knees.

"There's nothing here," he reported discouragingly, "but a roll of tarpaulin, some rope ends, and the splintered handle of a paddle."

"Well, what more do we want? That means a sail, if we can make a hole in one of the thwarts to step a mast. How much cloth is there?"

"Two or three yards."

"Pass it back here; good, solid stuff that. Now, Miss Vera, what are your discoveries?"

She looked up quickly, her eyes sparkling in the dim gleam of the lantern.

"A bag of sea-biscuit, a small beaker of water, insipid, but sweet, some strong cord, and a brad awl."

"Lord!" I exclaimed, "this is almost too good to be true. Why, we are outfitted for a voyage. However, there is little use endeavoring to rig up a jury mast before daylight, when we know in which direction to steer. McCann, you haven't been overboard, and, no doubt, your watch runs; what time is it?"

He fumbled about and found the timepiece, staring at it in amazement.

"Must have stopped, Hollis," he said. "No, by jove, the thing is running all right; the hands point to 1:30."

"That's about the hour. The collision occurred before eight bells, or else Seeley would have been on the bridge, instead of aft by the cabin."

"He had just been called, he told me, and had reached the deck when that devil rammed us."

"On the starboard quarter?"

"Forward on the right as you face the bows, just about at the bridge. I only had a word or two with him. He said the other vessel was a Black Star boat, and that not a man forward of our main hatch had a chance. She cut clear into us as far as the wheelhouse, and then deliberately backed off, and let us sink. Seeley cursed them for a pack of cowards."

"Yes, I heard that. Have you any idea who was saved?"

"I heard the Captain's voice back there under the awning, ordering out the boats, and after I was caught under that wreckage Carrington came up from below and climbed along the rail. I called to him, but he paid no attention: there was considerable noise then, and he might not have heard me."

Vera was leaning forward listening.

"Did Mr. Seeley leave in the boats?" she asked. "Was he hurt?"

I tried to stop him from answering by a gesture of my hand, but the man was gazing out over the port quarter, and saw nothing.

"Seeley — the second mate? No, he didn't get away. The same spar that got me, caught him, and he never spoke after that: seemed like a nice fellow too."

Her face was like marble in the lamplight.

"He was killed! Then it was because he was killed he did not unlock my door: I — I am glad I know."

She buried her face in her hands, and sat there motionless. There was nothing I could do, or say, for I had no conception as to what the man was to her — lover, husband, father, friend? Truly only the last relationship appeared possible, for seemingly there could be no closer ties between the two. They were clearly not of the same class, yet the girl's sorrow was evidently real and genuine. Certainly I had no excuse for questioning her, and if she did not care to volunteer information my duty was to remain silent. I knew nothing about her, not even her name, or why she had stowed herself away on the yacht. I had asked once, and met with repulse; I had no intention now of repeating that indiscretion. And then, really, it was nothing to me; as a woman in distress, helpless and alone, I would serve her as best I might, but beyond that would stifle my curiosity, and remain silent. I determined this in my own mind easily enough, yet she was a most attractive young woman, and I was already more deeply interested in her personality than I would confess even to myself. The mystery of who she was, and why she chanced to be there, only added to her fascination, and I was aware, deep down in my heart, that some time I should demand an explanation, and ascertain the truth. But not then; not in that rocking cockleshell, with death staring in our faces; I would wait, and prove myself worthy of her confidence first.

To relieve my own mind, I compelled McCann to pick up a panakin, which had lodged under a thwart, and bail out the boat. He crept about, grumbling to

himself, but did a fairly good job. As no water oozed in through the seams, we were soon floating with much greater buoyancy, the planking under foot rapidly drying. There was nothing more to be accomplished before daylight, and the man crawled back into the bows, and curled up as though dead tired. The girl had not spoken, or shown interest, and I spread the tarpaulin, as well as I could, to make her a bed, and she lay down also, shading her face with one arm. A few moments later the lantern flickered, and went out.

The night was dark and thick, but without rain. My wet clothes clung to me in discomfort, yet I had no reason to fear evil results, as the air was warm, and the salt water had its own virtue. The sea was not dangerous, merely the long surges of the Atlantic, and the whitened crests enabled me to meet these bows on. The boat rose and fell like a rocking horse, and, with my oar in the rowlock astern, my task was such an easy one that I had difficulty in not falling asleep. It was nearly four o'clock by my watch, which I had carefully set by McCann's, when the sky began to grow gray, and I was thus able to locate the points of the compass. We were heading to the south of east, directly off shore, but, as we were making no real progress outside our drift, the direction in which the bow pointed could make small difference until we rigged a sail.

It was a gray, ghastly morning, the sky overcast, the great surges bearing down upon us, ever racing toward our little cockleshell, terrifying in their aspect. The sharp bow of the dinghy rose to them buoyantly

enough, but the broad expanse of troubled waters stretching all about, the black, cloud shadows overhead, and the little boat in which we were tossed, combined to bring to me a feeling akin to despair. This was not my first experience of shipwreck, or of being afloat in a small craft on the great sea, but then there had been twenty of us in a strong whaleboat, well provisioned, possessing a compass and knowledge of the course to the nearest land. But now in this cranky, narrow craft, drifting steadily off shore, a stormy sky threatening, only a bag of biscuit aboard, and with no assistance except a girl and an incompetent landsman, our situation was indeed a desperate one. The only hope was the possible overhauling of some passing ship, but the lowering sky scarcely enabled me to see clearly a hundred yards, even in the light of the gray dawn. A rescuing vessel might easily pass us by within a quarter of a mile unseen, nor had we any means of attracting attention. I confess that, sitting there in loneliness, staring about into the grim expanse of fog and sea, I fell into a blue funk. Nor was I greatly heartened when the sun finally rose above the horizon, for it was no more than a sullen red glow, barely visible through the clouds of vapor, and only rendering more ghastly than ever the heaving leagues of ocean.

My glance turned downward to my companions in the boat. McCann still slept, with head pillowed on his arm, but the woman lay with her eyes wide open, looking upward at the drifting spume. Her eyes met mine, and she sat up, grasping the gunwale with one

hand, and stared about her over the drear expanse of sea.

"There is nothing in sight?" she spoke wearily. "You have seen nothing?"

"No; the mist is too thick to give much of a view; as the sun rises it will become clearer, no doubt. You had some sleep?"

"Not even a doze. But really I needed none, for I had nothing to do on the *Esmeralda* but sleep, and I do not feel as though I would ever require any more."

"Were you locked into your stateroom all day?"

"Yes; Mr. Seeley thought it safer, fearing otherwise a discovery of my presence by the steward."

She hesitated, and I hoped was about to make some further explanation, but instead asked:

"Are you sure Mr. Carrington made his escape?"

"As certain as I can be. I did not see him after I left the party in the after-cabin last evening. But McCann insists that he came on deck, and joined the others in lowering the boats. Beyond doubt he got away safely, and was picked up by the liner."

"Who were the dead men in the cabin, and on deck?"

"The steward, and two passengers — Fosdick, and a banker whose name I have forgotten. Most of the crew must have perished forward."

She was silent for some time, her gaze on the man sleeping in the bows. He rolled over, revealing his face, gray and haggard in the dawn.

"Who — who is that man?" she questioned. "You call him McCann; is he a sailor?"

"No; he was one of the guests. I met him a year or so ago, and he seemed to be a good fellow among the crowd he was accustomed to, but I judge is going to make a mighty poor hand at this sort of adventure. He is a rich man's son, who occasionally takes a flyer on wall street."

"Not — not Fergus McCann?"

"I believe that is his name, now that you recall it. I saw the address once on a letter he was using to keep score for a card game. Why? Did you ever know the fellow?"

"Only by reputation, which is not the best. He was involved rather unpleasantly in the Bascom shooting case. It was generally believed that only money prevented his indictment."

"Aye, I remember. I read about the affair in a Chicago paper at the time, but failed to comprehend it was this McCann who was involved. Did Bascom die?"

"He will be crippled for life; of course his assailant may not have been entirely to blame — it was a drunken quarrel over a woman."

"Well," I said quietly, "the man is in for a job of sailor work here, whether it pleases him, or not. He acted a bit sullen last night, but I am in no mood just now to baby him. Have you ever steered a boat with an oar, Miss Vera?"

"I have done lots of canoeing, and last summer at Palm Beach," she stopped, laughing at the slip — "Yes, actually at Palm Beach, I steered some larger boats. I — I believe I could."

"You will find this somewhat different. Still, there is not much of a trick to it, and I am going to let you try your hand. I shall need McCann to help me rig up a jury mast; then we can sail some set course. Sit down here beside me, and see how you get along. That's it; all that is needed is to keep the bow to the surges — good, you are doing fine!"

I watched her for some minutes, finding little to criticise, but fascinated by the girl's bright face, and the picture she presented outlined against the dull gray of the sky. Her dishevelled hair was blown back, and her eyes sparkled, as she leaned hard on the steering oar.

"Do you think you can hold her all right?"

"Of course I can," almost indignantly. "Really, Mr. Hollis, I have steered boats in worse seas than this. If the oar wasn't quite so heavy —"

"There is no steering paddle aboard. Well, if anything goes wrong, sing out. I'm going to rout out that fellow forward, and get at our work."

I cannot say that McCann was particularly pleasant about it; he had a way of showing that he rather resented my assumption of authority, and performed what I ordered with a deliberation which was almost insolent. However, he made no open revolt, and I thought it best not to anger the man unnecessarily. No doubt he was bruised by his accident on the yacht, and stiff and sore from his night in the boat, and would feel in better humor later in the day. We worked steadily for an hour, the fellow proving practically useless, except to

hand me the article required, or to throw his weight on a rope's end. Vera succeeded in holding the boat steady, although I thought the weight of the waves increased as though we were on the outer edge of some storm.

I lashed an oar upright to a thwart, bracing it securely by ropes to oarlocks on either side; then secured the broken paddle handle as a spar, notching the oar to give purchase, and rigged up the tarpaulin, being compelled to use rope-ends to secure it in position. It was a rough job, yet the stiff canvas bellied out in the wind, and I was conscious of a thrill of hope, as I crept back to the stern sheets, grasped the steering oar, and headed the boat into the southwest. She danced away through the gray waters, under easy control, and making fair progress, no longer a dead, helpless thing beneath our feet.

CHAPTER VIII

I ENFORCE AUTHORITY

SCARCELY had we taken this new course when the sun, now well above the horizon a red ball of fire, burst through a rift in the clouds, and the waters in our wake became a trail of crimson. The encircling mist seemed rent asunder by some invisible power, whirling away like wreaths of smoke blown by the wind, and yielding us broad view to where sky and ocean met. It was a rare sea picture, the jagged cloud masses high above, somber and dark, assuming grotesque forms; and beneath the restless waters, each wave crested with white foam, rendered more conspicuous by the dark hollows. One moment our boat was down in the shadow, walled in by green ridges; the next flung high on the creamy crest and flooded with sunlight. Yet our straining eyes caught nowhere a signal of life or hope, no gleam of distant sail, no black shadow of smoke. We were alone in the drear waste of water, with not even a speeding seagull to break the dull vista of warring sea and sky.

I forced myself to turn away from the grim fascination, back to the boat in which we floated. McCann had sunk down abaft the jury mast, and rested there hanging over the side, staring moodily down into the green water. His heavy face exhibited no interest and

looked almost brutal in the garish light. Lord, how the appearance of the man had changed! Could this be the same fellow I had played cards with on the quarter-deck of the *Esmeralda* only two days before? Why, then he had been the life of the company, full of humor, a bit rough in speech to be sure, and drinking more than was necessary, yet apparently a good fellow. But now — why, he actually had the aspect of a brute; aye, and likewise the manners of one. A single night of danger and exposure had sufficed to bring to the surface his true character, had stripped off the veneer, and proven him a bullying coward, inefficient, and unwilling. I felt my teeth close tightly as I looked at him, but relief came when I turned toward the girl, seated near me. She was gazing out at the weird sea scene spread about us, unconscious of all else, her eyes wide open with the joy of it, her face glowing with eager appreciation. She must have felt the intentness with which I regarded her, for she turned suddenly, a flush sweeping her cheeks.

"Isn't it wonderful, Mr. Hollis, the way those clouds and waves blend yonder, such a marvelous massing of colors? Oh, there is no beauty like the sea!"

"But always a cruelty in its beauty, like that of a tiger cat," I answered. "Perhaps we had better breakfast, Miss Vera; let me see your bag of biscuits by daylight."

She brought them forth, together with the jug. A little sea water had seeped into the bag, and the outer layers were more or less mildewed, yet enough remained sweet and wholesome to give me hope of their sustain-

ing us until we should be picked up by some passing vessel. The water jug, however, was only half-filled and must be sparingly used.

"We will go on short rations," I announced, breaking a biscuit with my knife. "Just enough to keep us from starving. Here, McCann, is your portion."

He reached out and took what I handed him; then gave utterance to a curse.

"My God! do you mean I am to breakfast on this half biscuit?" he exclaimed angrily.

"On that, or on none at all," I answered, eyeing him sternly. "You haven't done so much work as to earn double rations. I give you the same as I take myself. All we have is what is in this bag, and heaven knows when we shall meet a ship."

"Ship, hell! We are not far from Long Island."

"Two hundred miles at least, and with this jury rig we should have to make some wide tacks on that course. We are scarcely doing three knots an hour with the wind as it is, and a much heavier blow would strip us clean. Take what I give you, man, and be decent about it."

He grumbled something regarding his belief that I was keeping most of the food for myself, but I broke in, determined to end the discussion:

"That's enough talk. Eat your half biscuit the same as we do, and be thankful you have got that; and when you come to the water, one swallow each will be all we are entitled to. You hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you; but who the hell are you?"

"The only seaman on board, McCann, and the life of this young lady, as well as your own, depends on my judgment. I am not seeking trouble with you, but you will obey my orders while we are afloat here, or take the consequences. That half biscuit is your ration; eat it, or leave it, as you please, but you'll cut out the profanity, and I'll not warn you again."

He was too great a coward to force the issue, and fell to munching his biscuit, one hand gripping the gunwale, as though he wished my throat was between his fingers. I cared little what he thought, although I realized his nature by now sufficiently to understand that he would accept the first opportunity to get the advantage of me. It was treachery I had to guard against, however, and not a fair fight. As I nibbled at my own small portion, watchful of his movements, and thinking of how best to keep the fellow at a safe distance, the girl leaned toward me, and whispered a word in my ear.

"He has a revolver."

"Are you sure of that?" I questioned cautiously, in surprise.

"Yes, I saw the butt in his pocket, while he lay asleep in the bow. You will be careful, Mr. Hollis?"

"You need have no fear for me," I answered reassuringly, and ventured to touch her hand where it rested on the thwart between us. "I have been a bucko mate, my lady, and learned how to handle his kind. If he ever draws a gun on me out here, I'll teach him something he never learned yet in Wall Street."

The hours of that day fairly dragged along, as we stared out dull-eyed on the same vista of sea and sky. Twice we thought we caught the gleam of a sail over the tumbled waters, only to discover the object to be a floating cloud. Once smoke became visible to the south-east, a thin wisp, barely showing against the distant blue; but the steamer passed us unseen below the horizon. McCann, so far as I observed, never so much as glanced in our direction, but faced forward. He found a package of cigarettes in his coat pocket, and smoked two without offering any to me. Finally he lay down in the bottom of the boat, tossing about restlessly for awhile, but, at last, falling asleep.

The girl and I talked, avoiding as much as possible all reference to our situation, and the fate of the yacht, our conversation drifting here and there. In a way I learned much about her, little hints of disposition, likes and dislikes, as well as experiences in life, yet nothing was said which revealed her identity, or helped to solve the mystery of her presence on board the *Esmeralda*. I could not feel that she purposely concealed these things, yet nothing led to an explanation, and I rather avoided the subject through fear of offending her. I did learn, however, that her mind was bright and original, her language evidencing education, while her reminiscences proved that she had traveled widely, and seen much of social life. We spoke of books, of art, of drama, and she exhibited even a wider range of knowledge on these subjects than I possessed, while her comments were keen and original — not pedantic, nor

bookish in any way, but the outspoken frankness of young womanhood. Indeed, she was wholesome all through, her face a mirror of her nature, her eyes reflecting back each mood. Never before had I met one of her sex so deeply interesting, so unconventional and plain-spoken. No doubt it was the way in which we had been thrown together which had broken down thus completely the social barriers; but, be that as it may, the result was admiration on my part, which, perhaps, I did not wholly conceal.

However, our conversation lapsed at last, through sheer weariness on my part. I had been at the steering oar so long, staring out into that drear expanse of ocean and sky, that every muscle of my body ached, and my eyes could scarcely be forced to remain open. In the silence she must have noticed this, for she exclaimed suddenly:

"Why, I never thought! you must be nearly dead with fatigue. Let me take the oar while you sleep."

"I am afraid I shall have to," I admitted, "for I must keep awake tonight. There is no sign of storm now, and the sea is even less rough than it was an hour ago. You feel competent?"

"Why, of course; you saw me steer. If anything goes wrong I can call you easily enough. Please lie down for a few hours."

I looked about, permitting her to grasp the oar, and slip into my seat.

"Really I feel as if I must," I said regretfully, "and there can be no danger while things keep as they are.

Call me, though, if there is a change in the weather, for that jury mast will never stand any weight of wind."

"I promise; but I am a better boatman than you think."

I lay down, pillowing my head on my arm, but remained awake some little time, watching her movements. She handled the boat easily, however, and her calm coolness gave me such confidence that, insensibly, rocked by the gentle rise and fall of the craft, I drifted off into unconsciousness.

I must have slept for several hours undisturbed, for, when I finally opened my eyes once more the sky above us was beginning to turn purple with twilight, and the breeze had failed, so that the sail flapped idly against its improvised mast. This, perhaps, was the noise which had aroused me. I sat up wide awake instantly, and stared about me in the boat. There was little change noticeable; Miss Vera still clung to the steering oar, showing no outward signs of weariness, and greeted me with a smile and nod of the head; but McCann had moved forward, and sat playing idly with an open jackknife. I had a glimpse of him beneath the makeshift sail, but if he saw me rise he exhibited no manifestation of interest.

"I bear testimony that you slept well, Mr. Hollis," the girl said cheerfully.

"I did not realize until I lay down how weary I was," I replied, adopting her manner, "but really you had no right to let me lie so long. Why, I must have been sleeping three or four hours, and you will be tired out."

"Oh, no; it was no trick at all. The wind kept steady until just a few moments ago, and I do not feel in the least fatigued."

"And you have seen nothing? no smoke, no sail?"

She shook her head, her eyes grown grave.

"Not a thing; we seem to be absolutely alone in the immensity of the sea — just one great wave after the other. It — it gets on the nerves."

"It certainly does; such a sight has driven more than one insane. But what does this mean? Why is the biscuit bag out here?"

I pointed to the bottom of the boat, beyond her feet. Her eyes met mine, her answer made in a whisper.

"He — he crept back here while I was adjusting my oar, and took two."

"McCann?"

"Yes, he had the bag before I noticed, and I thought it best not to anger him then, for he held that open knife in his hand."

"You should have called me."

"The mischief was done before I had any time. Besides I knew you needed the sleep. What are you going to do?"

I smiled a bit grimly, glimpsing him beneath the sail.

"I am about to give Mr. Fergus McCann, late of New York, a little specimen of sea discipline which I hope may last him for the remainder of this voyage," I replied quietly. "He ate the biscuits, I presume?"

"Yes, slowly, morsel by morsel, as though he was

really hungry. You must be careful; you know the man is armed."

"The more reason why I should attend to him now; he is a constant peril to both of us as long as he retains that gun — it gives him courage to do just as he pleases. Hold the boat steady, Miss Vera, and leave me to attend to this degenerate son of wealth."

I crept forward, scarcely jarring the frail craft, and was beyond the jury mast before the fellow had aroused sufficiently from his knife play even to note my approach. He stared at me insolently, leaving the keen blade trembling in the plank. No doubt he had expected some such call, and had decided on his course of action. The expression of his face — defiant, sneering — as he stared back scowling into my eyes, told me instantly what he proposed doing. He was armed; he would show me who was to give orders.

"McCann," I began, wasting no time in preliminaries, lifting myself on one knee, and facing him, "the young lady says you took advantage of my being sound asleep to help yourself to biscuits; is that so?"

"Well, what if I did? I was hungry."

"So am I; so no doubt is the lady, for the matter of that. Hunger is no justification for stealing. You were not starving; you received exactly the same share we did. More than that, I have assumed command of this boat, because I am the only one on board knowing the ways of the sea. I told you plainly what you were to do, and I propose to enforce my orders. Not another bite will be given you today, or tomorrow."

"Is that so?" he drawled, a wicked smile revealing his teeth. "You must think you are dealing with a foremast hand. It takes something besides threats to run me, Mr. Robert Hollis."

"Threats are not my stock in trade; whatever lesson you are due for you are liable to get. Understand this clearly, for I shall not repeat it — you obey my orders, or take the consequences."

He half arose to his feet, but I forced him back onto the thwart none too gently. His face was red with passion, his eyes malevolent.

"Damn you! take your hands off me!" he snarled. "No blustering sea bully is going to make me jump at the crook of his finger. You touch me again, and I'll show you who I am, you big brute. Me take orders from you? Why, hell; I've got more money in New York than you ever saw."

"If you owned the Bank of England it would mean nothing to me. You will do what I say, or I'll make you."

"You will? how?"

"No matter how; I've trained more men than you to obedience in my time, and always found a way."

"Huh! the bucko-mate business, hey?" he sneered. "Well, just try that on me, if you think it safe. I'll show you —"

His hand darted back toward his hip pocket, but I was looking for the movement, and ready. His fingers had barely gripped the butt of his weapon when my clinched fist crashed into his face. I have struck

harder blows, for I was not poised to put my whole weight behind it, yet the man went over as though floored by an axe, and lay huddled in the bows quivering like a jelly fish. I jerked the revolver from the grip of his hand, dropped it into my pocket, wrenched the open knife from the wood in which it stuck, and closed the blade.

"Get up now, you fool," I ordered sharply. "Oh, yes, you will," and I gripped him by the collar and lifted him roughly to his knees. "That is likely to be the last time you will ever attempt to pull a gun on me. Make another movement, McCann, and I'll throw you overboard. Now listen; you are no Wall Street broker at present; you are merely a foremast hand, and I'm your master. You better get that idea into your head right away. You take your orders from me, and you jump when I speak, or I shall take pleasure in breaking every bone in your body. Do you understand that?"

I doubt if he could see out of one eye, but the other exhibited a terror almost pitiable.

"Y — yes."

"Say sir, when you speak to me."

"Yes — yes, sir."

"You'll keep to this end of the boat hereafter; whether I am asleep, or awake, you stay forward of the jury mast."

CHAPTER IX

WE SIGHT A TRAMP

THE one blow, coupled with the loss of his weapons, had so completely cowed the fellow, that I scarcely gave him another thought. He had been bully all his life, protected by wealth and position, but had sense enough to realize that these things did not count for very much alone with me in an open boat at sea. No doubt he would hate me, and plan revenge, but for the present, at least, there would be little opportunity for those plans to assume definite form. Once safely ashore, and amid his own kind, he would scheme to crush me; but until then I could ignore his very existence, except to enforce my orders. I crept back to the stern, and took the steering oar, the girl's eyes meeting mine questioningly.

"I could not see all that occurred, because of the sail," she said. "You disarmed the man?"

"Yes, I have his revolver in my pocket, and the knife also. He will make no more trouble; the fellow is an arrant coward, but no less dangerous on that account. Come, we will divide a biscuit between us, and then it will be your turn to lie down."

"But doesn't McCann have any?"

"He has had more than his share already. I'll offer

him a swallow of water — that's all. I imagine the way his head feels, he has forgotten all about being hungry."

"You had to strike him?"

"Slightly, a mere tap of sea discipline," and I glanced at my knuckles. "He was armed, you know, and I could take no chances. There is no harm done. Come; are you not tired enough to rest?"

She glanced up into my face.

"You will call me at midnight, if I fall asleep?"

"If I feel worn out then, and the sea keeps as it is, or no worse. There, take my coat for a pillow. No, really I shall not need it; this is an ideal summer night. Did you ever see the sky more glorious with stars?"

"They only make it all appear more lonely, and fearful," she said thoughtfully. "I never realized before the awful immensity of this vast ocean. Why, do you know, I thought of it as covered with ships, yet we have floated all night, and all day long, without glimpse of either smoke or sail; nothing to stare at, hour after hour, but sea and sky."

"We are out of the track of ships."

"But do you still believe we will find one?"

"I have every faith in the world," I answered heartily, determined to conceal my doubts. "If the weather holds pleasant, we should be far enough south by morning to be in the North Atlantic lane between New York and Liverpool. We are fully fifty miles now from where the *Esmeralda* went down, and there must be ships aplenty in these waters. Of course, I can only guess at our position, but I know within a few miles of

where we are. Lie down, and rest, Miss Vera; there is no sign of any storm brewing, and tomorrow you'll probably have the deck of a liner under your foot."

I know not how much she may have believed of what I said, but she smiled me a cheerful good-night, and lay down in the bottom of the boat, my coat folded under her head. She rested there motionless, her face shadowed by one arm, and very soon her regular breathing convinced me she slept like a tired child. I looked at her shadowy figure; then forward to where McCann hung silent in the bows. It was a dreary picture, that little cockleshell, tossing up and down on the surges, the vast expanse of black, limitless water on either hand, and overhead the infinite spaces, decked with glittering stars. It seemed as though some spectral hand clutched at my throat as I stared about, the drear desolation gripping me like a delirium of fever. What if we should not overhaul a ship? what if some evil fate would permit of our floating on unseen? It was all guesswork where we were; we might be leagues yet from familiar waters, for I had no guide except sun and stars, and a vague memory of our position the noon before the yacht sank. And there were few eatable biscuit left, and barely a cupful of tepid water. The thought of what the end might be nearly crazed me, as I sat there alone in the silence and gloom — I could picture those final hours of despair, as we lay starved and helpless in the unguided boat, the girl mercifully unconscious, perhaps, and McCann a gibbering idiot. My God! I must stop thinking! I must be a man for

her sake; aye, and retain my self control, so as to do a man's work to the end.

The wind strengthened, not blowing steadily, but in little puffs from the east. I trimmed the makeshift of a sail as best I could, knowing it would be useless to arouse McCann for such a sailor's job, and headed our course to west of south, as closely as I could judge direction by the stars. An hour later we were bowling along at a fair rate of speed, the little dinghy laying down to it, the black water lapping her port gunwale, and a fine line of foam stretching astern. She was a crank craft to control with a heavy steering oar, and I had small faith in the lashings of my improvised mast, which might go by the board at any minute. The action and the anxiety were the very tonic I needed, however, and my mind cleared with the struggle.

At midnight the wind was at its height, and I did not call the girl, as I dared not trust her to steer the craft through such rough water. She slept undisturbed, not even changing her position, a mere dim outline at my feet. Forward McCann had stowed himself away beyond the bow thwart, and I could see nothing of him under the bight of the sail. I was the only one awake in the leaping boat, fighting its desperate way through the black waters under the dull gleam of the stars. With straining eyes I held on, forgetful of all else except duty, thrilled, and exhilarated by this life and death struggle with the sea. Occasionally a slapping wave showered me with salt spray, and once we shipped a bucket of water amidship, yet, all in all, the laboring

dinghy proved herself a fair sea boat, and I held on grimly, driving her through the smother, until the dawn gave me view across the gray expanse.

McCann being first aroused, crept out of his hole, and seated himself where he could stare back at me. One eye was completely closed, and encircled with a black ring, and, after a minute, he began to bathe the bruise, dipping up water from overside with one hand. He did not speak, nor did I offer to address him. He had proven such a despicable poltroon that my desire as far as possible was to avoid all possible contact. The sun had begun to show above the horizon before the girl finally awoke, and sat up in the bottom of the boat, staring about her with wide-open eyes, as though startled by the change in the aspect of the sea. Finally she lifted herself to the nearest thwart, and greeted me reproachfully.

"You have let me sleep all night, and lying on your coat. Why, you are wet through."

"Nothing but a dash of salt spray; the sun will dry me out in an hour," I explained. "There was no reason why I should disturb you, Miss Vera, for the sea has been running too high to permit of your handling the boat."

"But you must be tired nearly to death."

"Far from it; and we are to be blessed with another day of sunshine. Perhaps by afternoon the sea will have gone down, and I can get a nap. Are you ready for breakfast?"

My explanation did not satisfy her; I could read that

in the expression of her face, but she made no further protest.

"There have been no ships — nothing has happened during the night?"

"Not so much as a shadow to arouse suspicion; but I hope much from these hours of daylight."

"You believe we are now in the track of any ocean steamers?"

"To the best of my judgment we are close to the lane of inward bound liners. Of course, it is mostly guesswork, but I have a sailor's instinct."

She drew out the biscuits from the locker, broke one in two, and handed the half to me. Still clinging to the bag, her glance fell upon the slouching figure of McCann in the bow, and then her eyes sought my face questioningly.

"You are not going to offer him any?"

"He deserves none; he has already had more than both of us together. How many are left?"

"Seven fit to eat. But — " she hesitated, yet went on bravely enough, "please, he is not accustomed to being deprived of food, and is really suffering. Let him have my share, for I am not at all hungry — truly I am not."

"I shall insist on your eating," I said, almost sternly. "Your share is little enough to sustain life. If it comes to a choice between saving you, and that miserable thing yonder, my course is taken. However, I grant your request now, although I doubt if he shows even gratitude. McCann!"

He lifted his head, and stared aft, but without changing attitude.

"Here is your ration. You do not deserve a bite, nor would you receive any through me. You owe this to the lady — catch it now."

He picked the half biscuit up from the bottom of the boat, where it fell at his feet, and began nibbling at it, like a famished dog. There was no sign of thankfulness in his action, and he continued to glare at us with one eye open in sullen insolence. Anger overcame the small measure of sympathy I felt for the fellow.

"You see, Miss Vera," I said bitterly, "he is too much of a brute to even appreciate your kindness. The fool even imagines I am afraid of him, and do not dare enforce my orders. There is only one way to handle his kind."

"Yet I am not sorry, Mr. Hollis," she answered softly. "I could not bear to think of him sitting there all day with nothing to eat. Because I do not like the man, is no reason why I should wish to see him suffer."

The recollections of that forenoon are not altogether distinct in my memory. I was weary and sleepy, yet dared not desert the steering oar, for the sea ran strong, and the wind struck us in sharp gusts. The shining water, sparkling under the sun's rays, blinded my eyes, and altogether I was in no mood for assuming a cheerfulness of demeanor I was far from feeling. Yet I dare not confess the truth and add to the despondency of the girl beside me whose eyes never seemingly left the line of the horizon; yet who, as the leaden hours slipped

by without reward, began to droop perceptibly, and ply me with questions I found hard to answer. We talked little, for our stock of commonplace was completely exhausted, and our minds centered only upon one thing — the possibility of rescue. Indeed, her palpable efforts at cheerfulness hurt me more than her silence, they were so plainly assumed, and, when she glanced up at me, I could perceive the lines of hopelessness in her face, and the pleading of her eyes. There was no coward in her nature, no shrinking; never had I been companion with a braver soul, yet she already realized fully the desperation of our situation, and no words of mine brought comfort, or lasting confidence. McCann remained like one stupefied; never changing his posture. He had turned his back upon us, and faced forward, but whether to keep watch, or doze, I could not determine, for his body was slouched down into utter shapelessness.

The sun blazed down upon us out of a clear sky, glistening along the foam of racing waves, but, as noon approached, the southern sky became misty, the clouds increasing in density until we could see only a few hundred yards beyond our bow. It was not a storm cloud, and brought with it no fear of disaster, but completely blotted out the horizon, and gave a dark, sullen gloom to the surrounding waters. I had permitted the boat's head to fall off, and, with barely steerage way, the makeshift of a sail flapping against the mast, we rose and fell on the giant surges.

It must have been three o'clock when McCann sud-

denly gave vent to a startled roar, straightening to his knees, and pointing straight ahead into the smother. I stared, but saw nothing except the grotesque forms assumed by the whirling mist, but Vera leaned out over the side, shading her eyes.

"What is it?" I asked sharply. "Make a report, man!"

"A ship yonder!" he shouted, but without turning his head. "I saw it plainly enough, but it has gone now."

"I see it, Mr. Hollis!" the girl cried excitedly. "Right out there through that lane of mist — it's a big steamer!"

"Straight ahead?"

"Just a little this way — there! you can see her now!"

I did, a mere glimpse, instantly obscured, but visible again a moment later. The fog seemed to drift apart, leaving a broad lane, and in the very center appeared the steamer, looking a mammoth to our eyes, and already so close that my first impulse was to hail. But before I could put this into execution, McCann was on his feet, gesticulating wildly.

"Now, damn you!" he shouted, "put us on board there, and I'll show you who I am. You brute, I dare you to put us on board."

"Sit down!" I ordered. "Now, keep still, and stand by with that rope. I'll put you aboard all right, but until I do, you will obey what I say, or go into the water."

I took my eyes off him, and stared at the vessel, conscious instantly that something was wrong. Every detail was clear by this time, each rope and spar traced cleanly against the brown background of mist. She was apparently a big steel freighter, four thousand tons I guessed, her water line showing a heavy cargo, and her bows red with rust where the black paint had disappeared. Loaded as she was, the steep sides yet towered above us menacingly, although the open rail amidships gave me glimpse of her deck. It appeared deserted, and the vessel scarcely moved through the water, a mere spiral of smoke showing above one yellow funnel, a single screw churning lazily to keep her under control. The foremast was broken off at the tops, remaining a great splinter, and where the bridge and wheelhouse ought to be there was piled a mass of wreckage, showing black above the bulwarks. A wheel had been rigged aft on the poop-deck, and there alone I saw evidence of human beings on board. One fellow stood gripping the spokes, while another leaned motionless against the rail facing forward. Neither one saw us, although I swung my hat, and sent a hail across the intervening water. The girl glanced back into my face.

"What is the matter with them, Mr. Hollis?" she asked. "Is something wrong?"

"I am afraid so; their foretop mast is down, and it looks as though it had smashed the bridge and wheelhouse when it fell. They have rigged up an emergency wheel aft. Can you make out her name?"

"The *Indian Chief*, of Philadelphia."

"No regular liner — probably a tramp. I never saw funnels painted like that before, and she shows no flag. However, any port in a storm."

I stood up, hollowing my hands.

"Ahoy there! *Indian Chief*, ahoy!"

CHAPTER X

ON BOARD THE "INDIAN CHIEF"

THE man leaning on the after rail turned, and gazed down at us, shading his eyes, and the heads of a half dozen others bobbed up above the forward bulwarks. I could see the fellow aft plainly now, a broad, stockily built man, with extremely red face, wearing overalls, and a woolen shirt, open at the throat. In appearance there was nothing of the officer about him, yet it was his voice which finally answered my hail, sending a deep, roaring note across the waters.

"Hullo, there. Who are yer? From some ship close by?"

"We are passengers from the American yacht *Esmeralda,* sunk in collision two nights ago, and have been afloat ever since. Can you take us aboard?"

"Passengers, you say? All of yer passengers?"

"Yes."

He turned, and spoke to the man grasping the wheel, a tall, loose-jointed fellow in straw hat and pink shirt. There was a moment's argument before he returned to his position at the rail.

"I dunno as yer would be much better off along with us than yer are thar in the dinghy," he called indifferently. "For, in a manner o' speakin', we're no

more than a wreck. I reckon thar ain't no one among yer who knows how to navigate?"

I stood up, hollowing my hands to make my voice carry more clearly.

"That is not a very sailor-like speech, my friend," I shouted, yet striving to conceal anger. "But as you put humanity on those terms, I'll answer you. I have been in the merchant service, and commanded ships."

"Hell! Is that so? Sail, or steam?"

"Steam — the old Atlas Line. Do you take us aboard?"

He did not answer directly, but had lost his air of indifference, striding forward to the end of the poop, and giving orders to the men forward. The black heads adorning the forecastle rail disappeared, and a moment later the round, red face again appeared.

"Aye, we'll take yer, sir," he called down, a touch of deference in his hoarse voice. "Ye'll understand the trouble once yer come aboard. We'll lower a ladder near the mizzen chains; there'll be no danger laying the dinghy alongside here to leeward. Yer all able to climb, I reckon?"

"We have a woman with us."

"It'll be quite a job to rig up a swing, sir."

I turned and looked at her; then up the straight, steel sides looming before us, but before I could speak, she had made decision.

"I can go up the ladder, Mr. Hollis," she said firmly. "I am not afraid."

"All right," I called. "Lower away, and send a man down to steady it below."

The little dinghy swept in easily, and, under my directions, McCann awkwardly fended it off from scraping against the steel sides. Protected by the great bulk of the almost motionless steamer, the water had merely a perceptible swell. As the rope ladder straightened, I caught the lower coil, and held it firmly. Down the ratlines, hand over hand, until he dropped sprawling into the boat, came one of the crew — a coal black negro. The fellow above, now standing on the rail and clinging to a backstay, roared down at him.

"Haul her in, Simms; haul her in. That's more like it. Now hold all taut. Send up the lady first, captain; there'll be a hand to help her in the chains."

She did not hesitate, grasping the rope firmly in her hands as the negro and I lifted her high enough to get foothold. The fellow seemed to enjoy his job, his black face glowing; but for an ugly scar he was a picture of good humor.

"You are all right, Miss Vera?"

"Yes," she called down.

"Then go up, but hold tight; the vessel may roll."

McCann followed, too glad to thus escape me to refuse, yet plainly enough half dead with fear. As soon as I saw his legs dangling, while the seamen above dragged him inboard, I drew myself up to the lower ratline, leaving the negro alone to hold the line.

"Hey, above there," I shouted. "What shall we do with the boat?"

"Let her go; there is no room to stow it on deck. Come aboard, Simms."

We went up together, the ladder swinging dizzily to our movements. Once I glanced over my shoulder, at the empty boat, already twenty feet from the ship's side, a deserted, pathetic spectacle. Somehow it was like parting with an old friend. Then hands gripped me, and I was hauled in over the rail, and found a footing on deck. The negro followed unaided, and the voice of the man who seemed to be in command growled down from the poop:

"Haul in the ladder, and stow it; then go forward and get some o' that riffle overboard afore dark. This way, captain; I'd like a private word with yer afore yer go below."

I paused an instant, glancing curiously about. The deck amidship was clear, although not overly clean, but forward of the main hatch a pile of debris extended almost from rail to rail, where the shattered foremast had crashed the wheelhouse into splinters. Here all was a tangled mass of steel and wood, spars, ropes, and all sorts of odds and ends. The foremast had been chopped away, and thrown overboard, but much of the remaining woodwork appeared blackened by fire. There were perhaps a dozen men in view, a typical freighter's crew, I judged, mostly foreign faces, two of them negroes. They worked silently, and then shuffled forward, without exhibiting the slightest interest in my presence, or giving a glance aft. Evidently something unusual had occurred, but just what was the nature of

the accident to the *Indian Chief* I was unable to decide. I climbed the few steps, and joined the red-faced man waiting me on the poop.

He held out a fat, pudgy hand, not altogether clean, which I accepted rather doubtfully. His face was honest enough, but his eyes were mere slits, contrasting strangely with his apparent heartiness of manner. The wheelsman stood cross-legged, a cud of tobacco distending his cheek, and looked me over coolly, as if taking my measure for a report to his mates.

"I am very glad to welcome you on board the *Indian Chief*, captain — captain."

"Hollis," I answered shortly. "And your name?"

"Masters — Gideon Masters."

"In command?"

"Well, yes, in a way. I reckoned you'd want the whole story, an' thet things hed better be explained afore yer went below."

"Of course; but first a question or two, Mr. Masters. What has become of my companions?"

"The lady was sent into the cabin, sir, and given a stateroom where she could fix herself up a bit," he answered soberly. "The other feller had a hell of a lot to say, an' seemed to have some sorter grudge against you. I hadn't any time to listen to his yarn just then, an' I didn't care a damn about it anyway, so I naturally turned him over to the bosun, ter have thet eye dressed. He must have got a hell o' a swipe, sir."

"I had to hit him — yes; but we can talk of that later. Where is he now?"

"In the galley, sir, where they're heating some water. After they get him fixed up, is he to go aft, or forrard?"

"Aft, if you have room to spare; he is no sailorman, but a millionaire from New York; he has money to burn."

The fellow looked at me with his mouth wide open, his glistening eyes almost laughable.

"The hell you say, sir; he don't look the part to my notion. You was all part of a yacht party?"

"Yes, the *Esmeralda*, a steam yacht, owned by Gerald Carrington, of New York, the copper operator on Wall Street — you may have heard of him?"

"I reckon not," with a laugh, "that not being exactly in my line."

"Well," I went on, "we were run down about a hundred miles east of Montauk by a big liner, which must have been out of her course. She cut us square in two, but, excepting us three, all living on board got away in the boats. By accident we were left, and escaped later in the dinghy."

"What became of the liner?"

"She picked up the boats, and, thinking they had all the survivors, went on. She was a mail boat, likely. The yacht went down five minutes after we left her; we've been afloat ever since. Now, Mr. Masters, that's our story in brief. What's the trouble here?"

He crossed over to the lee rail, and expectorated overboard, coming back wiping his lips on the sleeve of his shirt.

"I'll tell yer enough to make it clear, sir," he said slowly, "although there is others on board who can explain more in detail. You're a seaman — or was once — so you'll see easily the sorter fix we're in. I'm the only officer left on the hooker, an' I couldn't navigate a ship if you'd give it to me. I'm only the chief engineer, an' my assistant is in the fo'castle with a broken leg. You see thet riffle for-rard, sir? Well, it wus lightning did that. Two bolts, so the crew says, fer I wus down below, an' never knew whut happened till the electrics all went out. Then I shut off steam, and clumb out on deck. Lord, but it wus a black night, raining cats and dogs, but no wind to speak of. It wus the rain what saved us, for fire started yonder — yer can see where it burned — but it died out of itself. We couldn't do nothin' but hang on till mornin'; only a few of us from the stokehole aft, and all the rest o' the crew huddled on the fo'castle. Them fellers would a taken to the boats, I reckon, only there's none strung for-rard o' the foremast, an' they couldn't get aft across that wreckage. Well, sir, when morning come we saw what we was up against; it looked a lot sight worse then than it does now. Them bolts of lightning hed knocked the foremast into smithereens, killed the wheelsman, and put the steering gear plumb out o' commission. Then the topmast an' spars just naturally wrecked the bridge, and chart-house, an' the whole mass caught afire. The second officer wus in the wheelhouse, sir, an' never knew what hit him, an' both the captain an' the first officer wus a standin' tergether on

the bridge. The top mast crushed the life out of 'em. There wus six sailormen hurt the same way, an' four of 'em died. It wus the damnedest mess I ever saw at sea, sir."

"Bad enough, surely; when did this happen?"

"Night afore last; we've cleaned up a bit since, but the crew wont work much under me, an' we're short handed. First we dug out the dead bodies, sewed 'em up as best we could, an' put 'em overboard. Then I rigged up this wheel aft, so as to keep an engine going, and hung on, waiting for something to turn up. There wasn't nothing else I could do."

"No, I presume not," and my eyes rested thoughtfully on the scene forward. "How is the hull — sound? You seem sunk deeply."

"That's cargo, sir; full to the hatches. The ship's dry as a bone; have had the well sounded every three hours."

"And what about the crew?"

"Just so, so; a crimp brought them aboard drunk, an' we were not at sea long enough for the mates to whip them into shape when this thing happened. I'm no deck officer, Mr. Hollis, and they don't take orders from me very well. I call 'em a damned hard lot."

I made no comment, endeavoring to turn all these facts over in my mind, and reach some decision. It was evident enough what was wanted, and how I could best serve; but would they be satisfied with the offer which I felt willing to make? It was far from my desire to assume command of the *Indian Chief*, and guide her

destinies on a long outward voyage, to whatever port her cargo had been consigned. What that port was made slight difference, for my whole desire was to return as quickly as possible to New York. I would, however, assume temporary command, and consent to navigate the vessel to the nearest American port, where a competent skipper might be procured, and a new crew obtained. Indeed, under the laws of the sea, this duty was all that could be expected of me; all I had any right to do. In every essential this was a salvage job; I had found the freighter floating helplessly on the high seas, and my skill alone would bring her safely into harbor. To this end I possessed authority, and could compel the obedience of the crew, an obedience which, no doubt, they would grant willingly enough in their eagerness to get safely ashore. But if I attempted more than this, and assumed command for the long voyage, I should be captain in name only, possessing no real authority on board, until after we reached the port of consignment, and I had communicated with the owners, and received their endorsement. The *Indian Chief* possessed no wireless outfit, and whatever I did must be on my own judgment. These considerations flashed swiftly through my mind, and I attained decision before Masters again spoke. I would navigate the boat to the nearest port on the American coast, notify the owners, and then leave them to do as they pleased with vessel and crew. I cared nothing for the salvage; the presence of the disabled steamer in these waters had saved our lives, which was reward enough surely. All I

cared for was to get myself and the young lady safely ashore. Why, even if further adventure appealed to me, I could never consent to drag that girl about with me to whatever foreign port awaited the *Chief's* cargo. My thought was interrupted by the sound of Master's voice.

"It sorter seemed to me, Mr. Hollis," he was saying, "thet maybe it would be best for me to explain these things before you went into the cabin. You'll naturally want to know just the condition before you decide what to do."

"I have decided, Masters," I answered briefly. "There is only one thing I can do legally, and that is navigate the *Indian Chief* to the nearest American port, and surrender her to her owners. As a licensed captain of steam I have authority to assume command to this extent, but no more. It is a salvage job, and I would be within my legal rights, but if I continued the voyage, and later the owners should, for any reason, choose to disown my act, it would place me in a serious position."

"I reckoned you would look at it that way, sir. I'm no sea lawyer, but I sorter figured it out about as you do. But that ain't the situation exactly."

"What isn't?"

"Why this owner business, sir. You see the owner of the *Indian Chief*, an' every pound o' cargo below hatches, is on board here."

"The owner is on board!"

"That's the gospel truth; that's why I took the

trouble to keep you here, and tell you what I have, before you went down and met him, sir. It gives you a chance to think out your best course."

"But if the man is aboard, why did he not appear on deck to give us welcome? Surely our arrival must have been of interest?"

"Likely as not he hasn't even heard yet that you are aboard. You see, his cabin is on the starboard side astern, and he would see nothing from them ports. Besides, Mr. Hollis, he is lame, and it is a bit hard for him to get around on a ship without help. What do you say, sir? Shall we go down now, an' talk it over below?"

"The sooner the better," I said, with a glance over the port rail. "The fog is thickening out yonder and we may have a rough night. The steamer would ride a heavy sea better with some more of that riffle overboard."

CHAPTER XI

CONTRABAND OF WAR

THE knowledge that the owner was actually on board changed the entire situation. I would have to argue it out with him undoubtedly, for quite naturally he would object to any return to an American port. Well, I might be in for a disagreeable interview, but I had made up my mind, and it was not to be changed by any bluster, or offer of high wages.

"Come on then, Masters," I said brusquely. "Let's get this over with."

The after cabin extended from rail to rail, the door opening directly from the main deck. It was of fairly good size, plainly furnished, a great contrast to the handsome sea-parlor of the *Esmeralda*, but familiar enough to me. A bare table extended lengthwise, its wooden surface stained and disfigured. A lantern, its globe discolored with smoke, dangled from a blackened beam overhead, and a small coal stove, red with rust, occupied a prominent position in front of the mizzen mast, its ill-jointed pipe leading somewhere astern. The carpet was of rag, rather gay in coloring, and showing unmistakable signs of long use, and the paint-work, originally cream, had long ago faded into a dirty yellow. Stateroom doors opened along either side, so close together as to prove them mere closets, containing

no other conveniences than a sleeping berth or two. The cabin, however, was well lighted, much of its front being open to the deck, and having also a dead-light above. Masters led the way around the butt of the mast, and I followed, having taken all this in at a glance. There were two cabins astern, occupying apparently the full width of the vessel, and the engineer rapped with his knuckles on the panel of the nearest door. There was no response, but a second attempt resulted in a voice bidding us enter.

It was a pleasant enough interior, lighted by two ports, but showing no attempt at decoration. There was a rug underfoot, two chairs upholstered in leather, a big sea chest, and a desk littered with papers. Shelves held a fair collection of books, while two bunks occupied the far corner. A man arose from one of the chairs, and faced us, the light from the stern port shining full upon him. He was tall, delicate looking, his features bearing marks of pain, yet certainly not over thirty years of age. He was not at all like what I had expected to see, and I faced him in surprise. He had taken a step toward us, limping slightly, but at sight of a stranger paused.

"Whom have you here, Masters?" he asked, his eyes on my face. "Is there another vessel near us?"

"No, sir," and the engineer stood, hat in hand, awkwardly shifting his weight. "We have picked up some castaways. This man here is Captain Hollis, late of the Atlas Line."

"Indeed," he held out his hand to me, his eyes look-

ing direct into mine. "I regret your misfortune, sir, but your coming is a Godsend to us. Your ship was wrecked?"

"Sunk in collision," I answered. "But it was not my ship: I have not been to sea for several years in any position of command. On this occasion I was a guest on board a steam yacht belonging to Gerald Carrington, of New York. The name of the vessel was the *Esmeralda*. I need not relate the details just at present, but three of us have been picked up by this ship."

"Three — all passengers?"

"Yes — one was a woman."

"Yet, if I understood Masters aright, you have been in the merchant service?"

"In every capacity: when I retired I was captain of the freighter *Vulcan*."

He stood silent a moment, thoughtfully considering me, and I could not determine whether or not he was altogether pleased. Finally, having apparently reached some decision, his gaze shifted to the face of the burly engineer.

"I will talk with Captain Hollis," he said quietly, "and, perhaps, you had better return on deck, Masters, and keep an eye out; the fog thickens, and we are in the track of ships."

"Very well, sir."

As the door closed behind the engineer's bulky figure, the owner motioned me to a chair, while he took another himself. He seemed doubtful just how to begin, opening a drawer in the desk, and bringing out cigars.

"You smoke, doubtless?"

"I thank you — yes."

"I hardly know how best to approach my subject," he said soberly. "If you were merely a shipwrecked merchant captain, I could make you a rather attractive offer; but, as you have retired from the sea, that would probably prove no special inducement."

"The pay, you mean? Well, hardly: I have no desire for a berth."

"So I supposed, or else you would scarcely have been one of Carrington's guests for a yachting cruise. I presume Masters told you the fix we are in?"

"Yes, as strange an accident as I ever heard of at sea. You have got to have a navigator, and I am perfectly willing to serve you so far as I can. I owe you this for picking us up from an open boat. With your permission, sir, and without mentioning pay, I will agree to take command of the *Indian Chief*, and sail her to the nearest American port, where you can procure officers, and, if necessary, a new crew."

He sat silent, one white hand crumpling a paper on the desk, his forehead creased, the lines of his face showing clearly. He appeared to hesitate, uncertain how best to answer me.

"I — I certainly appreciate your offer, Captain Hollis. It is a most liberal one, because, if I know anything of maritime law, you would be justly entitled to high compensation for thus saving both ship and cargo. I had intended offering you — at least that was my first thought — the sum of three hundred a month to

take command, the contract to remain in force after the conclusion of this voyage, if you so desired. This you will not consider? The money argument has no weight?"

I smiled, but shook my head.

"Then there is nothing left me, except to appeal to your humanity," he went on, leaning forward, his eyes on mine. "If you were an ordinary, rough sea dog, I should hesitate to make such an appeal, or reveal to you the desperate position in which I find myself. But you are not; while, undoubtedly, you are a good sailor, you are also a gentleman. You belong, I suspect, to my class, and I can give you my confidence, trust you with my secret. Is this not true?"

"I hope I am worthy of such faith," I answered wonderingly, as he paused.

"I repose that faith in you, and ask you to face this situation from my standpoint. I am the sole owner of the *Indian Chief*, and also of her cargo. Every dollar I possess on this earth is tied up on board this vessel. That is why I sailed as supercargo; I dare not trust the venture to anyone else. Under the hatches I have a cargo valued at nearly half a million dollars. It was purchased and shipped on the strength of a contract signed by a high official of one of the European governments, yet the responsibility of payment rests upon myself and a few intimate friends. If the *Indian Chief* safely discharges this cargo, within a designated time, at a certain port, or contingent thereto, I shall make a fortune, and retain my honor as a merchant. If not,

then I am a ruined man, Mr. Hollis, and my reputation is gone also."

"What port?"

"Hamburg."

"Your contract then is with Germany? Who was the purchasing agent?"

"The military attache at Washington."

"You have his signature?"

"Yes; but not with me here. I took precaution to forward that by mail to an American banker in Berlin."

I leaned forward, deeply interested by now in his unusual story.

"Then I presume your cargo is largely munitions of war?"

"Of that nature — yes."

"From what port did you sail?"

"Baltimore, July twenty-sixth; we were held back within the capes for two days by a severe storm."

"Then you have not heard of the declarations of war in Europe?"

His eyes widened, his pale face grew whiter than ever.

"War in Europe; already declared!" he exclaimed. "Is that actually true? We carry no wireless, and have spoken with no vessel since we left the Chesapeake. What nations are at war?"

"The last message we received on the *Esmeralda* was that Germany and Austria were already pitted against France, Russia, and England. The German troops had invaded Belgium in an effort to reach Paris.

The night before our accident a great British battleship, racing toward New York, passed us. She was under orders to bottle up the German liners. May I see your manifest?"

He took the list from an inner drawer, and handed it over to me without a word, evidently stunned by this unexpected news, and unable to speak. I turned the typewritten pages slowly, glancing quietly over the various items. They were astounding.

"Why, really, I can hardly credit my own eyes," I exclaimed. "You tell me these goods were actually contracted for by the German government agent in the open market?"

"Not exactly in the open market, Mr. Hollis. It was all accomplished in my name; I alone am known in the transaction. Certain intimate personal relations won me the contract, my mother being a relative of a high official. The negotiations were conducted secretly."

"I should suppose so; yet such purchases would look as though war had been anticipated. When were you first approached?"

"July second, but most of the cargo had been already collected. It was to have been shipped from New Orleans, but there was some mistake. As soon as I accepted the offer made me the goods were forwarded to Baltimore by train."

"There were other shipments, then?"

"I think so, from southern ports."

I arose to my feet, walked across to the port, and

The items were astounding

stared out into the thickening mist overhanging the water. The man did not move, or speak, and I turned again to find him with head buried in his arms on the desk. His attitude of complete despair was full of pathetic appeal.

"I am no international lawyer," I said gravely, "but there is scarcely an item on that manifest which is not contraband of war. The getting of this cargo into Hamburg, or any other port of Germany now, will be almost impossible, a mere gambler's chance. The guard lines are probably not yet entirely closed; luck and good seamanship might indeed discover an opening, but English and French war vessels are no doubt gathering along the coast like birds of prey."

He lifted his head.

"The German navy is strong."

"Yes; but not strong enough to cope with both Great Britain and France. For a while, however, they may succeed in keeping open a passage through the North Sea. That would be your only hope, for the English channel will be closed already."

"You have sailed the northern course?"

"Twice; to Christiania, Norway; the route is a stormy one, but not especially dangerous at this season of the year. The *Indian Chief* sails under the United States flag?"

"Yes."

"That might prevent a search, providing you had a good explanation ready, especially as you left port before war was declared. However, spies are every-

where, and the nature of the cargo aboard may be known. If so, every cruiser on watch has already been notified by wireless."

He arose to his feet facing me, his slender hands opening and closing nervously, his face white and drawn.

"I realize all this, Captain Hollis," he said, his voice trembling, "and also that there still remains a chance of success. I like your face, your manner of fronting things. I think you are the very man whom God has sent to me in this emergency. Listen; I tell you I am absolutely ruined unless I complete this voyage. I am a young man, not over thirty, but my health is gone. You can see I am practically a physical wreck, yet I am the only support of an aged mother, and three younger children. Two years ago no one had brighter prospects in life than I; now I am struggling desperately for mere existence. A little more than a year ago I met with a serious accident; I need not go into details — the result you can see by looking at me. For eight months I was in a hospital in New York, lingering between life and death. There was no one to attend to my business affairs, and everything went to the dogs. When I got out again all that was left me was this vessel, a reputation for business ability, and a few thousand dollars. This contract came to me as a God-send; it was so arranged that I was able to carry it with a little help. If successful, it will put me on my feet again."

"You are not German?"

"Not a drop of Teuton blood is in my veins, so far as I know. I never dreamed of the possibility of war, or even asked the nature of the shipments."

"I understand. Of course it makes little difference where one's sympathies chance to be in a case like this." I put my hand on his shoulder, and looked into his eyes. "You have been perfectly frank with me; now I am going to be just as frank with you. I believe your story, and my whole inclination is to stand by, and help you through. I have got a fair amount of sporting blood in me, and, while, I confess, I'd rather do my fighting on the other side in this particular affair, yet, for your sake, it would give me sincere pleasure to shove the bow of this old hooker into a German port. It would be some trick that, to test both nerve and seamanship. I don't say it can be done; but there is a fighting chance, and every wild drop of blood in my veins urges me to try it—"

"You will!" he interrupted eagerly, his eyes glowing. "You mean you are going to make the attempt?"

"No, I didn't say that, my friend; only that such is my natural inclination. If there was only my own peril, my own time, to be considered, I would shake hands with you instantly, and accept the adventure. But there is another on board this ship to be considered—a woman, whose comfort and wishes I cannot ignore. We have been shipwrecked together, and my first duty is to her. I can give you no pledge, sir, without her permission. I cannot compel her by force to take such a voyage as this will be."

"But she could be transhipped!"

"Which would at once reveal our whereabouts, and probable course. Any vessel speaking us would make report as soon as it reached harbor. Our only safe method of procedure will be to keep far enough away from any passing vessel during daylight to escape recognition, and to run the main European routes by night. If we so much as speak a ship, it will double our peril of capture; the wireless is our greatest enemy."

"Then what is it you propose doing?"

"Just this: I'll go out now, and talk with the lady. I'll explain the whole situation to her fully, so that she will understand every detail."

"But is this fair to me?"

"Yes, perfectly fair. She is no weak-nerved creature to be awed by peril. She is a healthy, sensible girl, ready to do her part anywhere; her sympathy will all be with you. Anyway, I shall leave the affair entirely to her decision. I'll give you my answer in thirty minutes."

I shook hands with him, conscious again of the pathetic pleading of his eyes as they met mine. As I turned to go, he sank down into the chair, a disconsolate figure, with haggard face toward me. As I closed the door, and stood outside in the main cabin, it suddenly occurred to me that I did not know the man's name. Masters had not mentioned it; I had not asked, nor did I recall noticing the signature on the manifest.

CHAPTER XII

WE ACCEPT ADVENTURE

AS I emerged from behind the butt of the mizzen-mast the only person visible was a long-legged cabin boy industriously rubbing away at a grease spot on the deck. He was not aware of my presence until I spoke, when he gazed up at me across his shoulder, with seeming little intelligence in his dull eyes.

"Do you know which of these staterooms the lady was given?"

"How's that, sir?"

"The woman who came on board an hour ago," I explained. "Where was she put?"

"Oh, yes, sir; over there; I just took her in a needle an' some thread."

"All right — what is your name?"

"Joe — Joe Moon, sir."

I crossed over and rapped at the stateroom door, which had a figure five stenciled on the upper panel. The boy stood up, and watched me curiously, rag in hand.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"This is Hollis; could you spare me a few moments?"

"Certainly; I will come out directly," she laughed, "I have been doing some emergency mending."

I picked out a chair, and sat down.

"Joe," I said, rather firmly, not altogether enjoying his rigid scrutiny. "I am going to command this steamer until we make port, so you will take your orders from me. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well then; go ahead into the galley until you're sent for. Tell the cook to have supper aft at seven sharp."

He disappeared, and a moment later the door of number five opened, and the girl greeted me pleasantly, crossing the cabin swiftly, and extending her hand, as I arose to my feet. If her gray suit had greatly suffered, my eyes failed to note the extent of damage, while she had contrived to rearrange her hair, and her eyes were no longer haggard.

"I feel actually born anew, Mr. Hollis," she exclaimed. "I am almost afraid I was losing my nerve in that little boat. Where is this steamer bound?"

"That is what I called upon you to discuss."

"Called upon me to discuss; how ridiculous! What should a girl know about such things?"

"It is rather odd, I confess; but, as it happens, the situation is a strange one. You know nothing about the conditions on board?"

"Very little; only that the ship was struck by lightning, and several men killed. You came to tell me about it?"

"Yes; sit down here, and I will give you the whole story. The captain and both mates are dead; the fellow on deck in charge when we came aboard was the chief

engineer. The owner of boat and cargo, however, is here; I have just been talking with him in the cabin yonder. He is in poor health, and crippled in one limb."

"What is his name?"

"Foolishly I forgot to ask, and Masters — that is the name of the engineer — neglected to mention it when he introduced us. However, that makes no difference in the facts. I'll tell you the story, as briefly as I can."

She listened intently, leaning forward in her chair, her ringless hands clasped, her eyes on my face. The simple story seemed to thrill her, breathing as it did the mystery and romance of the sea. Again and again she interrupted with some swift question, or exclamation of surprise, but generally remained silent, her lips parted in breathless anticipation.

"And that, Miss Vera," I said at last, "is the present situation. It is for you to furnish the final solution."

"For me! You tell me all this merely to leave the decision with me?"

"Yes; I shall do nothing against your expressed wish."

"Why — but what would you do, if you were here alone?"

"That would be entirely different. I have no family, no near relatives living; not even any special friends to mourn greatly over my demise. I might willingly risk my life in such an adventure, and think little of it. I know the sea, and its perils, and such a game as this is likely to have its attractions. I confess frankly that if

I was here alone on board I should probably accept the chance."

"You — you consider the attempt very dangerous?"

"Of capture, and possible imprisonment — yes. Probably our lives will not be in any special peril. We have no arms with which to resist. If once overhauled a prize crew would be put on board, and we would be taken to the nearest British, or French port, as prisoners of war. Our cargo, destined for the German government, would be amply sufficient to condemn us. Under the circumstances, our own country would make no effort to protect us."

"Yet you believe there is actually a chance to get through safely?"

"A chance, that's about all; it is purely a question of good luck, and good seamanship. I'd rather like to serve that fellow in there; he's certainly up against it hard; absolutely ruined if this venture fails. But it means danger, no doubt of that. I should not mind, but I cannot expose you to hardship, and possible imprisonment."

Her eyes were shining, and her hand reached forth, unconsciously, and rested on mine.

"How long would it require?"

"Weeks probably; I should choose the more northern route, around Scotland, and then skirt the Norway coast through the North Sea. Those are stormy waters; and besides we shall have to jockey back and forth to escape being seen, and reported."

"To place me on some other vessel at sea would spoil your plan, Mr. Hollis?"

"It would render our chances of success much less. The only possibility would be the meeting of some American ship, homeward bound, whose captain would promise to make no report. Such a one might be hard to find, especially if he suspected we were endeavoring to carry munitions of war to Germany; then if we closed his mouth that would be no guarantee that his crew would not talk, so soon as they landed."

"Do you believe the Germans are right in this war — that you ought to aid them?"

"I cannot answer that," I answered honestly enough, "for I do not fully understand the conditions. To be perfectly frank, however, my sympathies are with England and France. In this case I am not considering either side, but the poor devil who owns this ship and cargo. What we carry on board here will not be a drop in the bucket, but its loss will spell ruin to him, and that is the thought which influences me."

"And I could not even dispatch a message — wireless?"

"The *Indian Chief* has no equipment. No, Miss Vera, we shall be absolutely lost to the world until we are either captured, or safe in some German port. Even then it may prove extremely difficult to communicate with our friends. I would not deceive you — the project is both a desperate, and a dangerous one."

The girl remained silent, her eyes lowered to the deck. I had said all possible, determined as I was not

to influence her decision. As she did not speak, or change her attitude, I arose and walked across the cabin to where I could look out forward. I hardly knew what I hoped her decision would be, for my sympathies were about equally divided between the desperate man sitting alone in the after cabin and this girl so unexpectedly called upon to meet this emergency. As to my own interests, and inclinations, they were entirely blotted out.

"Mr. Hollis."

"Yes," I turned, and met her questioning eyes.

"I must decide this? You mean to leave it all to me?"

"There is no other way."

"But I do not know what to say. I thought at first I could answer yes, gladly. I am not afraid, not the least bit afraid; and if I could only get some word back to my people in New York that I am safe, I would almost welcome the adventure. I am only a girl, you know, and I — I like such things. But they will worry horribly, for they have no knowledge of where I am. No one knows. I — I have simply disappeared, and papa will have detectives hunting for me, and will have to tell mother. They will imagine all sorts of horrid things. Truly it — it doesn't seem as though I could remain here, and — and not even let them know that I am alive. And you say it may be weeks, or even months, before I could get a message to America."

"I am afraid so, Miss Vera: I wished you to understand the exact truth."

"Oh! I do not think that would be right — do you?"

"I thought you might feel that way, and so made no pledge before telling you the story. Of course, I knew nothing of how you were situated; or under what circumstances you had left home."

"I stole away unknown to anyone; it was just a lark, a foolish joke. No one knows where I am."

"Your home then is in New York?"

"Yes; all my people live there." She hid her face in her hands. "They are probably wild about me by now. Oh! I cannot; it would be too cruel. If I could only send them word!"

I touched the bent head gently with my hand.

"Do not worry," I said kindly. "We will give the scheme up entirely, and head toward the nearest American port. Perhaps luck may favor us, and if we meet an American ship, we can tranship you, and then take a chance, knowing that you are safely homeward bound."

"But I understood you to say that that would only increase your peril."

"It might, and it might not. At least I will not consent to have you implicated in the affair any further than you are now. Your first duty is to your mother. I will not sacrifice you to help our friend yonder save his fortune. I'll give him my answer now."

I took a step aft, but paused suddenly, for the door of the owner's cabin opened, and he came limping forth, resting heavily on a cane, his white face clearly revealed in the glare of the overhead skylight. I stepped back

beside the girl, who, aroused by my sudden movement, glanced quickly up, and saw him. Almost instantly she was upon her feet, hesitated an instant as though perplexed at the man's appearance; then advanced, and met him.

"Mr. Bascom," she exclaimed, "can this indeed be you?"

"You speak my name certainly," he replied, but gazing into her face seemingly without recognition. "Yet I do not recall —"

"Oh, yes you do! surely you must," she interrupted. "Why, you have changed more than I. Do you not remember the moonlight nights at Palm Beach? The fishing parties along the coast?"

"Vera!" he cried, a note of delight in his voice. "Of course I remember; but you have become a woman, the very last person in the world I expected to see. And so you are the lady we were fortunate enough to rescue. Mr. Hollis never even mentioned your name."

"There was no reason why I should," I said, "having no thought of your previous acquaintance. The young lady and I have just been discussing the situation —"

"Wait, just a moment, Mr. Hollis," she interrupted, her eyes still on Bascom's face. "This discovery changes everything. Mr. Bascom is an old friend."

"So I judge; but I do not intend to let that influence your decision."

"But it will, and does!" a certain impetuous appeal in her voice. "I did not understand before, as I do

now. You are the owner, Mr. Bascom? This is your boat, and cargo?"

"Yes, Vera; things have not gone very well with me of late, and my entire fortune is here," he answered rather bitterly.

"I am sorry; I had not heard. You have been terribly ill from your looks, and are lame. It — it was that affair in New York, from which you never recovered?"

"I was in the hospital for months, and scarcely hoped to live. That was when my business went to smash."

"Father never told me; and your mother?"

"Is living in Philadelphia, but in rather straitened circumstances, and ill; my younger brother has been compelled to leave school, and seek employment." He smiled weakly. "I had hoped this voyage would set us all on our feet again."

She released her hand from his grasp, and sank down once more into the chair, her glance leaving his face, and seeking mine.

"Mr. Hollis," she said, almost defiantly. "It is my wish that the *Indian Chief* continue its voyage."

"But I cannot consent —"

"You left this decision to me. You said plainly that only my presence on board deterred you from accepting command. Well, I make that decision. My comfort, even the momentary fear which my family may feel over my strange disappearance, could never justify my refusal. I know this gentleman, and have met his mother; we were good friends. He shall not be ruined

through any whim of a girl. Whatever may occur to us during the next few weeks, I shall not fail to do my part."

"You mean this?"

"I not only mean it; I urge you to go ahead, not considering me in the least."

"I cannot quite understand so sudden a change."

"Perhaps you do not understand women," she said, and smiled. "It is our privilege to change our minds without apparent reason. But in this case my reason is a worthy one." She paused, her manner changing. "Surely you recall who Mr. Bascom is?"

"Not in the remotest degree."

"But we spoke of him in the boat — Philip Bascom."

My eyes widened, and I caught my breath.

"Good God! yes; now I recall the affair. He is the man Fergus McCann shot in the hotel restaurant. That was the accident he speaks of. Why, this is strange enough to be fiction."

Bascom stood, leaning on his cane, looking at us, as though failing to comprehend what it was we were talking about. Possibly he did not catch our words clearly, for his white face appeared puzzled.

"You speak of me?" he asked, "of my difficulty with McCann?"

She looked up at him earnestly.

"Yes; it is very strange. You should know the truth. There were three of us who escaped together when the yacht sank; Mr. Hollis, myself, and — Fergus McCann."

Bascom straightened, his lips pressed tight.

"He is here now; a guest on board my ship?"

"Yes; I do not know where — sleeping in one of the staterooms, probably. Mr. Hollis was compelled to strike him while we were in the boat, and his face was badly bruised. I have not seen him since I came over the side."

Bascom's expression was one of struggle, as he stared into our faces. It was difficult for him to find words; to even control his mind.

"This — this is a misfortune," he said finally. "I do not know how it will end. I have sought to avoid the man. Miss Vera, do you know the truth of that affair? not the newspaper story, but the facts?"

She shook her head.

"I only heard that the trouble occurred over Myra Bradley. McCann found you together, and shot you in a fit of jealous rage."

"So far the story was true; but I was not at the restaurant with Miss Bradley. I had never, but once before, even spoken to her. She called me to her table that evening, where she was dining alone, to question me regarding some mutual friends in Philadelphia. Our brief conversation was most commonplace. McCann shot me without warning; I did not even know he was near, until the woman screamed."

"But," I said, as he paused, "was there no trial? That was not the newspaper story."

"I know it," bitterly, "and I have only my word to give you. I could not defend myself, and no one else

made any effort to do so. McCann had money, and influence; I was lying unconscious in a hospital. The girl was shipped off to Europe; a waiter swore that I drew a revolver, which he afterwards picked up on the floor; the police exonerated McCann on the ground of self defense, and the case never came to trial."

I held out my hand.

"Having had some experience lately with McCann," I said heartily, "I am perfectly ready to accept your version. His being on board is awkward and unpleasant, but we must put up with it as best we can. Is this your thought, Mr. Bascom?"

He did not answer at once; not until she looked up questioningly.

"There is nothing else possible," he said at last, but as though the admission hurt. "My nature is not revengeful, although I certainly have no feeling of kindness toward this man. However, this is my ship, and he is my guest; as long as he remains on board, I shall treat him as I would any other under like circumstances."

"I knew you would say that," the girl exclaimed. "Now everything is all right, Mr. Hollis?"

"As nearly so as we can make it," I answered, assuming an ease I was far from feeling. "Your decision is that we continue the voyage — to Germany?"

"To wherever Mr. Bascom desires to go."

"Very well," I turned to the other. "And you appoint me captain, delegating to me full authority?"

"I do, with pleasure."

I held out my hand, surprised to note the strong grip of the slender, white fingers responding to my clasp.

"The matter is settled then, let the result prove what it may. It is already growing dusk; I will go on deck, and assume command."

CHAPTER XIII

I SELECT MY OFFICERS

THE die was cast. However the strange adventure might eventually end, whatever peril lurked ahead of us, it was now too late for regret. The full responsibility I had assumed almost overwhelmed me as I first emerged upon deck, but there came to me also a spirit of recklessness, which brought a laugh to my lips and a shrug to my shoulders. Why should I care? It was her choice, not mine; and, if she thought enough of that wreck of a man in the cabin below to make such sacrifice, the affair was of small moment to me, yet it was an odd chain of circumstances which had flung these people together here in mid-ocean. A moment I lingered at the port rail, staring out into the smother of the coming dusk, wondering how it would all end, before I climbed the ladder to the poop deck.

The negro was at the wheel, while Masters stood aft gazing astern. He was not aware of my presence until I spoke sharply.

"Mr. Masters."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"I have agreed to take command of the vessel for the remainder of the voyage," I said quietly, "and would have a word with the crew."

"The remainder of the voyage, sir?"

"Yes; the vessel has suffered no serious damage, and there are surely seamen on board able to serve as watch officers."

"The bosun is a good man, sir."

"What is his name?"

"Leayord."

"Very well; have all the men piped aft. I do not like the looks of the sky, or the sea, and we must get those decks cleared."

"All hands, sir?"

"Certainly, Mr. Masters. They have had rest enough, I imagine, the past few days. Now they are in for a spell of work."

I was not altogether pleased with the engineer's manner, a vague suspicion coming to my mind that he also rather preferred a return to Baltimore, and that the crew might desire the same decision. However, the man was not a deck officer, and confessed to having had trouble in getting the ship's work done. No doubt this was the main difficulty, but those fellows would find me a different proposition. As I went forward to the rail I noticed that both Vera and Bascom had come up as far as the head of the companion, and now stood there in the shadow, where they could both see and hear. McCann, however, did not appear, and was probably asleep below, or still doctoring his discolored optic. I had just a moment to observe these things before the men began to appear aft the main mast, and form in a straggly line across the deck. They were, indeed, a rough-looking lot, even for a freighter's crew, plainly

showing the effects of prolonged debauches ashore, with several among them still manifestly under the influence of liquor. The attitude of most of them was plainly that of sullen indifference, although some of the younger ones indulged in rough horse-play, laughing insolently as they glanced aft. The reestablishment of sea discipline on board was evidently to be my first task, and my teeth clinched tightly as my eyes swept their faces.

"Come further aft, men," I ordered sternly. "Bosun, bring them closer in where they can hear what I say — ay! that's more like it."

I stared down into the upturned faces, noting, it seemed to me, characteristics of every race on earth, and realizing that here before me was grouped the scum of the seven seas.

"Men," I began, gripping the rail, and speaking swiftly, "there is no need of my telling you what has happened to the *Indian Chief*. You have lost shipmates, and all your deck officers, and have been drifting helplessly for two days. It is the future, not the past, we need to consider. My name is Hollis, and I held command in the old Atlas Line. The owner of this vessel and cargo — Mr. Philip Bascom — has just done me the honor of appointing me as captain for the remainder of this voyage."

The fellows remained silent, except for the restless shuffling of their feet on the deck.

"And what is the vige to be, Mister?" suddenly asked a hoarse voice back in the group.

"The same one you signed on for, of course."

"Ter Hamburg?"

"That's where we lay her head."

"But ter hell wid it; we've a wrecked ship, an' they tell us there's a war on."

"Who tells you that?"

"The guy that come aboard along with yer; he told the cook."

"Well, war or no war, this ship cleared before there was any declaration, and you fellows shipped with her for the voyage."

"That's a damn lie," sang out another voice shrilly. "The most of us wus signed on by crimps."

I straightened up, determined to end the matter then and there.

"We have had enough of this, lads," I said sternly, staring straight down into their faces. "I don't know who among you are doing all of this talking, but I'll answer you this. I am captain of the *Indian Chief*, and if any of you want to try out whether I can handle my crew or not, go to it. Bosun, come here."

The man named separated himself from the others, and slowly climbed the ladder. He was a big muscular fellow, with red hair, clipped close to his head, and intelligent blue eyes.

"Your name is Leayord?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"This is your first voyage on the *Indian Chief?*"

"No, sir; my third."

"Very good, Mr. Leayord; from now on you will mess aft, and rank as first mate, serving watch and

watch with me. Is there a man forward capable of filling the second mate's berth?"

He ran his eyes over the group below rather doubtfully.

"Olson might, sir," he answered finally. "He is sober, and a good seaman."

"Step forward, Olson."

The mass of men parted slightly, and the man was pushed to the front. He possessed a strongly marked Swedish face, smooth shaven and almost boyish.

"How old are you, Olson?"

"Twenty-eight, sir."

"You know the sea?"

"Twelve years in the fo'castle, sir."

"All right: I'm going to give you a chance to make good as second officer, Mr. Olson. Now, lads, that's all for the present. I take it you are sailormen, and know what that sky means. The chances are ten to one we'll have a storm before midnight, and we'll meet it better with clear decks. Get forward, all hands, and clear away that riffle — lively now."

They were a bit slow about it, grumbling among themselves. Olson spoke once or twice, although I could not hear exactly what was said, and the power of sea discipline finally conquered. They began shuffling forward, but in no good humor. Leayord lingered a moment to ask me a question; then joined the others on the main deck, roaring out orders in a full voice, which seemed to put some life into the men. I remained at the rail watching, rather pleased with the way my newly

appointed mates took hold, and confident the men would be kept at it. They were indeed a hard lot, yet possibly no worse than the average, and once they were sobered up, and settled to the voyage, would not probably give me any very serious trouble. Within ten minutes they were working cheerfully enough, and Leayord had ceased his gruff ordering, and stood silent beside the lee rail. It pleased me to observe that Olson took hold along with the others, and did his full share of the work. I leaned further over to gain view of the cabin entrance, but Bascom had disappeared. The girl, however, held her place, and glanced up, her eyes meeting mine.

"Could I come up there, Mr. Hollis?" she questioned.

"Certainly; as a passenger this deck is free for your use. Take the starboard ladder."

I gave her my hand, and helped her to grasp the rail. The sea was not heavy, but there was a nasty roll nevertheless, making it safer to cling to some stable object. She glanced about into the mist.

"How gray and somber it is," she said soberly. "The fog is almost like a hand clutching at you."

"The glass is falling rapidly," I answered, "and I suspect a storm is brooding behind that curtain; that is why I am so anxious to make all clear. What do you think of the crew?"

She glanced aside toward the motionless negro at the wheel, and then at the men shuffling about their work.

"I — I hardly know; they — they look awfully rough, and — and disreputable. Weren't some of them drunk?"

"No doubt, yes. But that is nothing unusual at this stage of a voyage. The ship is not long out of port, you know, and some liquor was undoubtedly smuggled aboard. We'll have a search for it presently."

"You do not think them a bad crew?"

"About the average, I should judge; all sorts and conditions of men, of the kind who go down to sea in ships. The trouble is that you are accustomed only to the passenger service — uniforms and scrubbed faces. We do not often pick that sort of seaman for the rough work."

She didn't speak for a moment, watching the moving figures curiously.

"They were very much dissatisfied with your decision to go on. They did not see us in the companion, and spoke rather freely about it."

"You mean the continuing of the voyage?"

"Yes; they believed the vessel would certainly put back to the nearest American port."

"You heard no inkling of their plans, I presume?"

"Only profane threats."

I laughed. "Well, don't worry, Miss Vera. Those things are frequent enough on shipboard. We will have these lads thoroughly tamed within another twenty-four hours. There is never a mutiny without some leader and a better cause. Those fellows shipped for Hamburg, and to Hamburg they go, unless some cruiser stops us. I am working under your orders, you know."

She glanced up quickly into my face.

"Under my orders? No, not that, Mr. Hollis. You

told me it would be your choice; I merely granted permission."

"Your permission was equivalent to an order. I so accepted it."

"But that is hardly fair. Not that I regret the choice, for I could never have forgiven myself if my selfishness had ruined Philip Bascom. He is really an old friend."

"So I supposed; a very interesting man in spite of his misfortune."

"He was indeed, before that bullet wrecked him. It is sad; and to think that the one who shot him is actually on board — his guest."

"Not altogether a pleasant thought to me," I said soberly. "For McCann is the kind to breed more trouble if he can find an excuse. I doubt if he suspects as yet who owns this ship, but the two are bound to meet. His tongue has wagged already about the war."

"The news has reached the crew?"

"Yes; that accounts largely for their objections to continue the voyage, although probably they were ripe enough for revolt before. I shall have to caution McCann, and he does not take such things kindly."

"You do not consider the man dangerous?"

"Not in the sense you mean. He will never attack openly, or permit himself to be known in any conspiracy. But he will have to be watched, nevertheless. He is the sort to harbor revenge, and as he feels hatred and distrust toward both Bascom and myself, we cannot be too careful. I shall have to tell Leayord the whole story."

"Leayord?"

"The man I named for first officer; he is standing abaft the foremast yonder."

"The second officer is a Swede?"

"Yes; rather young, but I like his face, and he seems to have the respect of the men." I turned, and gazed into the face of the compass already lighted.

"What is your name?" I asked of the black at the wheel.

"Watson, sah; Charles Watson."

"Well, Watson, let her head fall off a couple of points — that's it, my man. Is this the signal cord to the engine room?"

He nodded, the whites of his eyes showing oddly, and I rang for an increase of speed. Watson, bracing the wheel with one knee, wiped his lips on his sleeve.

"Am yo' shorely aimin' fer ter sail dis yere ship long ter Hamburg, sah?" he asked cautiously.

"You heard what I said to the men?"

"Yas, sah, I done heerd dat. But I thought maybe I best tell yer, sah, that thar's sure a bad lot forward, an' they's plum set against goin' no further."

"A bad lot, hey? And who seems to be the leader, Watson?"

He scratched his head.

"Wal, sah, there's two or three who has a lot ter say, but I sorter reckon as how de real boss is a white pusson call' Liverpool Red — he dun started ter knife me night afore last, and if I hadn't done got outer thar right lively I reckon I'd bin a dead nigger sure."

"What objection does this fellow and the others with him, have to finishing the voyage?"

"Wal, mostly at first it wus just ord'nary cussidness, sah. Ya see thar ain't mo'n a half-dozen deep sea sailors aboard; all the rest are jist coasters, and sich truck. Dem others wus mostly shipped drunk, and want ter git back ter Baltimore. That wus how it all started; but now they got the war ter harp about, dat Liverpool is a playin' it up ter beat hell, sah. He says this ship is loaded with war stuff, and bound ter be sunk, or captured; am dat so, sah?"

"We have a miscellaneous cargo," I answered, "and some of it might be contraband. But it was shipped before war was declared, and we have ample time to reach port before the establishment of a blockade. There will be no trouble, Watson, if the men only do their duty."

"Yas, sah."

"You let them know that I said so when you go forward."

"Yas, sah."

He was far from being satisfied, yet there was nothing more I could say in explanation. I left him, and walked over to the rail, realizing keenly the position of peril into which I had drifted. With a loyal crew my task would prove no easy one, but with a crippled ship, and the men already on the verge of mutiny, the situation was almost desperate.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CREW GROW UGLY

FOR a moment I remained forgetful of the presence of the girl on deck. The dusk of night had already enveloped us in its somber folds. Lanterns were being used forward, and the lamp was lighted in the cabin, its glow streaming out through the skylight. I could hear the sturdy rush of water past the ship's side, and feel the heaviness of the swell, but the clinging vapor still in the atmosphere rendered the night opaque. There was but one course to pursue — at the very first evidence of disobedience I must assert full authority. There must be no hesitation, no sign of weakness. And whether this method would succeed, or fail, depended utterly on the loyalty of my officers. I must depend on unknown men, and the test would come suddenly. Even as this knowledge crystallized in my own mind, the girl's hand touched the sleeve of my jacket.

"Supper is ready, Mr. Hollis," she said. "Are you not coming down?"

"Very shortly. I will have the men knock off work, and leave the mate in charge of the deck."

"What were you thinking about so earnestly? You actually forgot me."

I glanced aside into her eyes.

"Not guilty, Miss Vera: I was thinking of you, and of how I could get you safely out of this scrape."

"You wish I were not aboard?"

"The problem might be much more easily solved. Frankly, I anticipate the necessity for some rough work before many hours."

"The men, you mean? The wheelsman told you they were mutinous?"

"It has hardly gone that far as yet, but they are dissatisfied, and threatening. Most of them were brought aboard drunk; they have liquor still in their possession, and have not been at sea long enough to be given a proper taste of discipline. The loss of their officers served to increase the trouble, while they haven't taken my caliber yet. They are bound to try me out, sooner or later."

"To see how far they can go?"

"Yes, it will come to a show-down presently. I do not say this to frighten you, Miss Vera, only, perhaps it is best for you to know the situation. The first thing necessary on this voyage is to show those fellows forward who is master aboard. But we've talked about it long enough now. I do not anticipate any locking of horns tonight for those lads will need to discuss plans among themselves first. Bascom will be waiting for you in the cabin, and I will join you presently."

I walked with her as far as the ladder, and watched until she disappeared. Forward I could perceive little outside the glow of the lanterns in the radius of which black, grotesque figures constantly passed and repassed.

Occasionally a voice sung out some command, the words scarcely distinguishable. Judging from the plunging of the planks underfoot, and the rattling of the mizzen rigging overhead, the volume of wind was steadily increasing.

"Mr. Leayord!" I sang out.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Let the men knock off work for the present, and send the second mate's watch down for supper. You will take the deck, and it will be better to have another hand aft here at the wheel."

"Very well, sir."

I waited until he clambered heavily up the ladder and joined me, his huge figure outlined against the gleam of the binnacle light.

"Wind seems to be rising, sir," he said, lifting one hand to feel its weight, "and has shifted into the nor'west."

"Yes, the glass promises us a storm, and I look for a dirty night. How are matters progressing forward?"

"Most of the heavy stuff is overboard, sir, and there is room now to get around."

"We'll put the men at the job again after they've eaten; there is nothing like a clean deck on a stormy night."

"Right enough, sir, and the beggars are better kept at work."

"I was pleased to see the way in which they took hold, Mr. Leayord," I said quietly, "and that Olson set them so good an example."

He crossed over to the rail, and came back wiping his lips on his sleeve.

"Olson is a good man, Mr. Hollis; you made no mistake when you chose him for second officer, but I never saw a worse bunch of sea scum in any fo'castle than we've got aboard here, sir."

"They took hold, all right."

"Aye, for the once; they're a bit dazed yet, an' have had no time to talk it over among themselves. Besides there are sailors enough among them who know that that riffle had to be cleaned away whatever port they sailed for."

"We'll hear from them later, you think?"

"Tomorrow, sir, or perhaps tonight, as soon as they learn for sure the course we're steering. The nigger will tell them that when his trick is up, an' then the rumpus is likely to begin. They are dead set against Hamburg."

"Why Hamburg, Mr. Leayord?"

"Well, sir, I don't just know myself, for I was the bosun, and the lads never talked to me very freely. I thought I would question Olson a bit as soon as I got him alone. From all I've heard, however, it's largely caused by what that fat bloke yer brought aboard with yer had to say about this damn war breakin' out. I don't know the duffer's name, sir; but I hear he claims to be a millionaire, an' is willin' ter spend a lot o' coin, just to be took back ter New York. Cookie told me that he and the guy that goes by the name of Liverpool had quite a talk."

"Liverpool Red — yes, I've heard of him; he's the men's leader forward."

"Likely so; but there's others of the same kidney. If I was you, sir, I'd have a talk with Olson when he comes on deck again. He'll tell you mor'n I can."

"I will, Mr. Leayord, and then I'll attend to this fellow McCann. I've got his number already; that black eye he's carrying about I gave him in the boat."

Leayord chuckled.

"So I heard, sir; 'taint the kind o' treatment a millionaire is likely to ferget, but I guess it wasn't a lick amiss at that."

I stood silent a moment, staring out into the black void.

"I presume, Mr. Leayord, I can confidently rely on your loyalty in case trouble develops?"

"You sure can, sir."

"And Olson?"

"He'll face it like a man; and although Masters is a bit of a fool, I'm guessing he can be counted on in a pinch."

"Are there any others?"

"That's hard to say, sir, off hand. I haven't been shipmates with them, or with any o' this crew long enough yet to size 'em up; but there are a few men forward who don't chum none with Liverpool's crowd. Olson would know 'em better than I."

"Well, the sooner we learn exactly how we stand in this matter the better. I'll relieve you as soon as I have a bite to eat."

"Yes, sir, and the course?"

"Nor'east by east. There has been no observation taken for three days, Masters tells me, but that ought to keep us outside the regular steamer lines. Half-speed, and a good lookout forward!"

In spite of its general dinginess of paint and furnishings, the main cabin had a look of coziness and comfort as I entered from the black gloom of the decks. The table had been set for four, the swinging light above gleaming over a white table cloth, and an abundance of food. Bascom and Miss Vera occupied seats on one side, while Olson, washed and brushed into a state of rare discomfort, sat alone opposite. No doubt the fellow would have greatly preferred being forward, and was so embarrassed as to scarcely glance up at my entrance. A slim, narrow chested man, his weak mouth partially concealed by a straggling moustache, and who answered to the name of Dade, acted as steward, but the boy, Moon, was doing most of the work. I drew out the single vacant chair, and sat down.

"Well," I said pleasantly, breaking the rather awkward silence, "I do not exactly know where we are going, but we are on our way."

Olson's eyes wandered to the telltale compass overhead, but his mouth was full, and he made no attempt to speak. Bascom glanced from the girl's face across at me inquiringly.

"You have chosen our course then, Mr. Hollis?" he asked.

"Hardly; at least only for temporary purposes.

Yes, milk and sugar, Dade — one is enough. You see I have no observations yet, and I must find what charts are left on board. Remain after supper, Mr. Olson, and we will examine Captain Hadley's stateroom together."

"Yes, sir," he mumbled gruffly.

"But surely we are under way," Bascom insisted.

"Half-speed, and heading nor'east by east, which should take us out of the usual course of ships in these seas. By tomorrow noon I hope to know our exact position, and also the disposition of the crew."

"The sea is rising, I judge."

"There is every promise of a rough night, but nothing to worry over. Dade, why did you set the table only for four? There is another passenger aboard?"

"He has refused to mess aft, sir."

"Oh, he has! Well, possibly, I may have something to say as to that. Did he give any reason?"

Dade endeavored to hide a grin. "Not exactly a reason, sir," he answered softly, "But I took it from what he said that he was not overly proud o' the way he wus marked up, sir. He didn't appear to me to be in the very best o' humor, sir, if I may be permitted to say so."

I devoted a few moments to the meal, but when Dade departed on an errand forward, decided I might just as well discuss the situation frankly.

"I am beginning to fear," I said quietly, "that Mr. Fergus McCann intends to make us all the trouble possible, and is even now behind most of the dissatisfaction on board. Do you know anything definite, Mr. Olson?"

The mate paused in his eating, with knife and fork uplifted.

"You mean the man who came aboard along with you and the lady, sir?" he asked.

"Exactly; his name is McCann."

"I had not heard, sir. May I ask if he is rich?"

"Quite so; he was a guest on the yacht *Esmeralda*. Now that I have answered these questions, Mr. Olson," and I stared into his rather emotionless face intently, "perhaps you will be kind enough to answer mine."

"I would know what I talk," he returned stubbornly. "This man never speaks to me at all, sir. The only time I see him was when he come over the side, but I hear plenty talk among the men. That was before I was made officer, sir; no one say a word to me since. He, this Mister McCann, he offers ten thousand dollars to be put back in New York."

"So that's his game! Who brought the word forward?"

"Cookie, I think, sir. Anyhow he begun to talk first, and then Liverpool Red, and a fellow called Jim White slipped into the galley to make sure of things."

"And McCann satisfied them that he actually had the money?"

"He sure did, sir. I overheard Jim White say that he had a belt on him with more money in it than they'd ever seen before in all their lives. The damned fool — I beg your pardon, Miss — didn't know no more than show it to 'em. Why, the sight of it fairly drove them two wharf-rats crazy."

He stopped, his eyes on his plate, and none of the rest spoke. The same thought must have been in all of our minds, but we felt that Olson had not finished his tale. The silence caused him to glance up.

"There's half a dozen men forward," he said slowly, "who would murder their grandfathers, sir, to get hold o' all that coin. The rest o' the crew are decent enough fellows as sailormen go, but there's liquor aboard yet, and all this 'ere war talk has scared 'em against continuing the voyage."

"McCann told them?"

"He told Cookie an' Liverpool, an' they circulated the news. 'Tis said we're chuck up with contraband, sir, an' that if we're took every man jack of us will be chucked into an English or French prison."

"You expect a mutiny, then, Mr. Olson?"

"I don't know what'll stop it, sir," he answered solemnly. "The men went aft ter sorter take your measure, sir, and hear what it was you proposed doing. They ain't had no chance to git tergether an' talk since, but it's my notion they're ripe enough for the job."

I looked him squarely in the eyes.

"And how about you, Mr. Olson?"

"Me, sir?" his lips grinned. "If I hadn't intended for to stay with yer, sir, I never would a took the job."

I reached out my hand, and our fingers locked.

"Good; with both my officers loyal, we'll find a way out of this mess. The first thing to do will be to attend to McCann. Have you finished your meal?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then come with me into the captain's stateroom, until we see what we can find there useful."

The lady and Bascom remained seated at the table, but had finished their meal. Neither made any motion to stop us, or attempted to speak, although I heard their chairs pushed back before we left the cabin, when Dade, and the boy, began to clean up. We found the captain's door unlocked, and the room in fairly good order. It was sparsely furnished, containing only two chairs, and a heavy desk, in addition to the bunks. A bit of rag carpet covered most of the deck, and an ironbound sea chest, the key still in the lock, was stowed away in one corner. Above the desk hung the photograph of a pleasant-faced woman, and various nautical instruments were securely strapped along a shelf. I disturbed things as little as possible, leaving any necessary research into Captain Hadley's private affairs to a later date, but sought with some anxiety through a roll of maps shoved behind the chest, Olson holding a lantern aloft, until I finally brought forth an old chart of the North Atlantic. We bent over this, outspread on the desk between us, and Olson's stubby forefinger traced the prickings of two voyages around the Orkneys into the North Sea.

"All of ten years old," I said, "but accurate enough for our purpose. Now if we can only find the rest of the route. Try those charts again."

He unearthed one at last, showing the termination of the two voyages to have been Christiania, while the chart revealed also, although in somewhat less detail,

the German coastline. I was far from satisfied with this discovery, but nothing better could be hoped for. The total destruction of the charthouse forward made this find a Godsend indeed, and we were fortunate in the fact that Captain Hadley preserved his old maps. Bidding Olson relieve the first officer, I remained there alone for some minutes familiarizing myself with the two charts, and outlining in my mind the safest course to pursue. As I sat there the rising wind began to hurl rain against the closed glass of the port, and I could hear the splash of the drops on the deck overhead. An oiled coat, belonging to the skipper, hung dangling from a hook, and I slipped it on, extinguishing the light before closing and locking the door. Leayord was alone at the table in the cabin, which had already been cleared of its dirtied dishes, Dade disappearing with the last load as I turned about. A quick glance told me that neither Bascom nor Miss Vera were present.

"No change in the wind is there, Mr. Leayord?"

"No, sir; just a trifle heavier, with a bit more sea running; but the rain will keep that down, sir. The old hooker is riding nicely."

"So I observe. Most of the litter overboard?"

"The heavier bits; some of the tackle it might be well to save. Anyway, it is so dark forward I ordered the lads to knock off until morning, sir."

"Perfectly right, if the decks are clear enough for us to work ship. I'll take a look about forward myself."

I had advanced to the companion steps when Leayord's voice stopped me.

"Captain," he said in hoarse whisper, "was you planning to go forward alone?"

"Certainly."

Leayord glanced about uneasily.

"Well, I wouldn't sir, if I was you — not tonight anyhow. The men are that ugly there's no knowin' what might happen. Do you carry a gun, sir?"

"Why, no; I saw one there in a drawer of Captain Hadley's desk. You think the situation is as bad as that?"

"I'd go back and get it, sir," he said soberly, "an' then keep to the afterdeck till daylight."

"The men are drunk?"

"They've got liquor, an' there's no use searching for it in the dark. When daylight comes we've got a chance — " He hesitated as though afraid of going too far.

"What is it? you were about to suggest something?"

"Well, sir, maybe it's not my place, but if I was skipper, there's only one thing I'd try first of all to do, sir — I'd put that millionaire fellow you call McCann, where he'd keep away from the men forward. He's the one that's raisin' most o' the hell on board."

His words were no more than an echo of my own thoughts. An instant I stood staring at the rain beating fiercely against the glass of the companion, then turned back to the stateroom I had just left, slipped the revolver out of the desk drawer into my pocket, and reentered the cabin. Leayord pushed back his chair.

"Thank you," I said, "I shall take your advice."

"Will you need me on deck?"

"Not at present; this is your watch below. I shall remain up with Olson; he has scarcely had experience enough to be left alone yet. Better get what rest you can, Mr. Leayord."

"Very well, sir."

I buttoned the oilskin closely about my throat and stepped out on deck the wind driving the rain full into my face, and, for the moment, blinding me.

CHAPTER XV

I MAKE McCANN PRISONER

IT was intensely black forward, and no sound of movement reached me as I stood there above the swift patter of rain on the deck, the shriek of the wind amid the cordage aloft, and the slap of waves alongside. The *Indian Chief* was holding her head up to it finely, the buoyancy under foot yielding me an instant feeling of relief. Unless some accident befell the temporary steering apparatus, no ordinary storm would leave us in any danger. The great immediate peril was from within, rather than without — the treachery of men, and not the sea. It was evident enough in my mind that there were two elements of evil aboard — liquor and McCann's wealth. Either alone would have been bad enough, but thus combined they rendered our situation more than perilous — and I was facing this peril comparatively alone.

Standing there in the shelter of the hood, the rain beating against the front of the cabin, an occasional flash of lightning illuminating the wet deck, the utter loneliness of my position gripped me strongly. I knew nothing of my crew, except that they were already mutinous and dissatisfied and under the influence of a few really dangerous men. No doubt there were loyal, honest sailors forward, but I had no way of knowing

those who were to be relied upon in an emergency. I knew almost as little regarding the character of the newly chosen officers. Masters would doubtless perform his duty, but his work would keep him below, and he would prove of slight value on deck. My impression of Leayord and Olson was favorable enough; they were, undoubtedly, the very best material on board; yet, from long association with the forecastle, it was only natural that their sympathies should be with their mates forward. An efficient sea officer is not made over-night, and either man might fail me at a pinch. As to Bascom, he could never be counted on; while as regards Vera — but at thought of her, the cold perspiration beaded my temples with a horror of what might yet occur on board. No, the burden was mine, mine practically alone. There were others in whom I had some measure of faith, and who, I believed, would follow my lead just so long as it was apparently successful. But it was up to me to strike first, to assert my authority, and then maintain it. This was the one thing which would impress the mind of a sailor — a quick decision, a swift blow. This very night we must win the ship, if ever, and the first man for me to gain control over must be Fergus McCann.

I reached this decision coolly and deliberately, yet with no clear plan of action in my mind. I did not even know where the fellow had secreted himself since coming on board, although it was evident enough that he was endeavoring to avoid encountering me until he could make fast friends with the more desperate spirits forward.

I thought of sending the lad Moon in search of him, realizing the danger of venturing forward myself alone, yet stood there hesitating, feeling sure he would refuse to come aft. At that moment Olson sang out some order from the rail overhead, and I could hear the bustle of the watch along the black deck.

My eyes distinguished no figures, but suddenly a blaze of lightning seemed to rip the sky asunder, and, in the swift, ghastly glare, I perceived two human figures against the starboard rail, safe from observation beneath a boat swung in davits. The man directly facing me, his countenance illumined for a single instant by the flame, was Liverpool Red. Then all was silence and darkness again, the ship plunging against the storm, the deck swept by wind and rain. The very postures of the two men, the position chosen amidships, and in the shadow, led me to identify Liverpool's companion and guess their purpose. Very well, there was no better time than now to start my task. Yet I had scarcely taken a step forward when I became aware that their secret conference was over, and that the two were separating. I could not positively determine the movement in the intense darkness, but I felt assured that one of the two men had moved forward, crouching along the rail, leaving the second man standing alone. Unquestionably the one thus left would be McCann.

I waited motionless until the fellow stealing away was well beyond earshot, and then advanced straight across the pitching deck. The fellow, taken quite by surprise, stared at my indistinct figure, unable to de-

termine my identity until I spoke. There was that about his figure, black as the night was, which convinced me he was the man sought.

"Well, McCann," I said shortly, "you seem to prefer associating with the crew, rather than with your own class aft. What is the game?"

"I was not aware there were any of my own class on board," he answered sneeringly.

"Perhaps you have not yet discovered who are on board. Do you chance to know who owns this vessel and cargo?"

"Who owns them!" he laughed coarsely. "What the hell difference does that make?"

"It depends entirely on whether or not you have any decent manhood left in you," I said coldly, "and frankly I do not believe you have. However, the truth can do no harm, and we'll understand each other better. This ship and cargo are owned by Philip Bascom of Philadelphia."

"Bascom! By God! You don't mean it?"

"But I do; and more than that, all his fortune is invested in this one enterprise; that is why I consented to assume command, and sail the *Indian Chief* across to Germany."

There was a moment's silence.

"Bascom," he repeated at last. "You learned this from the ship's papers?"

"I learned it from his own lips — the man himself is on board."

He breathed heavily from surprise; then laughed.

"Lord, this is some news, Hollis," he managed to ejaculate, "but surely you hardly expect me to be sympathetic, do you?"

"No, I hardly expect it," unable to disguise my intense disgust at his tone. "I'd hardly expect you to exhibit ordinary decency under any circumstances; but I thought I would give you a chance. However, Philip Bascom is here, ruined by your persecution, crippled for life by the cowardly bullet — "

"Now, look here, Hollis," he broke in, "if you think I am going to stand for your bullying any longer you're mistaken. It's my turn to talk."

"Yours! What will you talk with — money?"

"Perhaps," he sneered, "and with men also. In the first place, I might as well tell you, I don't give a damn who owns this ship. Of course you gave me a jolt by saying that this man Bascom was on board, but, after all, that's nothing to me. We had our fight, and he learned the same lesson others have that Fergus McCann is perfectly able to take care of himself. Now I'm ready to teach the same thing to Mr. Robert Hollis, of Chicago."

I listened to him quietly, and my silence seemed to bolster up his courage considerably.

"Those are the facts," he went on, as I made no reply, his tone assuming a more marked bluster. "This is no small boat in mid-Atlantic, where you can bully me because of your physical strength. You made a mistake, Hollis, playing me for a fool. I've got your number already."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"You bet I am, but I'm not going to say any more about it tonight. Tomorrow I'll talk with you again."

He turned away, the shrug of his shoulders picturing contempt, and a studied insolence which set my blood boiling. With the grip of one hand I flung him back against the rail, and held him there.

"No, we'll discuss it right now," I said sternly, "but I'll do the talking in your place. You haven't anything to tell me. I know what your plans are already. When you came aboard you learned that there were men forward ripe for any dirty work if they could only be paid well for it. That is your long suit — money. The trouble with you, McCann, is that you have been brought up to believe that money will buy you anything. You get along very nicely on that theory in New York probably, but this is not New York. Just face the difference. You are not at present Mr. Fergus McCann, stock broker and multi-millionaire; you are a mere passenger, picked up at sea by the freighter *Indian Chief*. That is your exact status. On the other hand, I am no longer Robert Hollis, of Chicago, an idler and one of your own set; I am Captain Hollis, in command of this vessel, responsible for its safety. I know what you are attempting to accomplish, and I know your purpose. You have found a few ruffians forward, who will take your dirty gold. To gain control of the others you have played up the war scare. You think now that the time has come when you can act — is that so?"

He wriggled in an effort to break free of my grip, and I let go of him in utter contempt.

"You would find out," he snarled angrily, "if I called for help."

"But you are not going to call for help, for if you even open your lips for that purpose, you are going to die right where you stand. Take that seriously, McCann. You are endeavoring to incite mutiny on board, and under the law of the sea, I can kill you for it. Now, I confess my feeling toward you is not a tender one, but there is going to be no bloodshed if I can avoid it. Where have you bunked?"

"Amidship."

"Petty officers quarters. Well, I prefer having you aft. There is a vacant stateroom below. Walk ahead of me to the cabin, and go down the steps."

"You'll pay for this in the morning."

"Do not worry about the morning, my man. Trust me to take care of your friends forward when the time comes. This is not my first voyage. Move on!"

He could not have seen the expression on my face because of the darkness, but the tone of my voice, the sharp grip of my fingers on his shoulder, must have told him I was in no mood for further discussion. Sullenly he left the rail, and crossed the deck to the companion, with me trailing a step behind. I was aware that Olson was leaning out over the poop-rail watching our dim figures, wondering no doubt what was occurring below. I did not venture to glance upward, or remove my eyes from the prisoner.

"Below there," the mate called down, gruffly, "what's going on?"

"It is all right, Mr. Olson," I answered, speaking quietly. "I'll explain later. Open the door, McCann, and go straight down."

He must have realized the utter futility of resistance, for he never even turned his head, marching before me down the stairs, and across the deserted cabin. I threw open the door next to Bascom's stateroom, switched on the light, and glanced within, keeping my grasp hard on McCann's arm. The place was bare enough, a single bunk, with ample covering, and a wooden stool.

"Go on in," I said shortly.

His eyes met mine, black with a coward's hatred.

"By God! if you wasn't armed—"

I swung him about in sudden disgust, flinging him forward, and he fell sprawling on the deck, overturning the stool. The next instant I had closed the door, and locked it, dropping the key into my jacket pocket. There had been little noise, scarcely enough to arouse the sleepers below, and, it was with a feeling of decided relief, that I returned to the open deck. This easy capture of McCann would greatly simplify matters. Now, at least, we had time in which to prepare for emergencies, and solidify our forces for the defense of the ship.

The rain had ceased, the lightning showing only fitfully along the horizon. There were rifts in the clouds overhead, and I could perceive the glimmer of a star, or two. The sea, however, remained heavy, but with a steadier roll to the great combers. No movement at-

tracted my eyes on the main deck, and I climbed the ladder, joining Olson at the port rail. Two men were at the wheel, which bucked sufficiently to keep them busy. I could not distinguish their faces in the gloom, but paused to glance at the compass.

"You are off a couple of points, lads," I said. "Can't you hold her any closer?"

"Not the way the sea is running, sir," answered a voice, I recognized as Simms', "unless we raise a bit more jib, and the mate thought it best not to risk the canvas."

"Right, no doubt, but hold her down the best you can."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The response was cheerful enough, and I crossed the deck to where Olson stood, in somewhat better frame of mind.

"You are not exactly holding to the course, Mr. Olson," I said, but not unkindly, "and Simms tells me you thought it best not to shake out another reef in the jib."

"It would only strain the old hooker to buck these seas, sir," he replied, "and as you had no observation I hardly thought a point or two would make much difference."

"Nor does it; only I prefer to be consulted on such matters hereafter. You must have had some other reason?"

He glanced about to make sure of our distance from the men at the wheel.

"Well, in a way I suppose I did, sir," he admitted slowly. "The watch forward is sullen, an' I had no desire to stir them up unless there was some real need. It's Liverpool's turn on deck, Mr. Hollis, an' he an' I never was no friends. If I was to give an order, and then had to go forward to make 'em take hold, it might start up quite a row, sir."

"Quite a sensible decision. It may interest you to know that I have just cut Liverpool's claws — his friend McCann is below, safely locked up."

"Exactly, sir. That was what occurred on the main deck just now? He was very quiet about it, sir."

"Yes; fighting doesn't seem to be McCann's trade. He prefers to pay others to do that for him. But the fellow is no less dangerous on that account, Mr. Olson."

"I know that kind, sir," and the second mate hesitated. "Is it true what I hear that this one is a real New York millionaire?"

"He's rich enough, if that is what you mean."

"And you are not a real sailor, Mr. Hollis, but just a yachtsman?"

"Has McCann been circulating that yarn forward?"

"He has, sir. Simms just told me the story at the wheel."

"Well, then listen to me, Mr. Olson, and then see to it that the word gets to the crew. I was a member of a yachting party when we suffered shipwreck, but I'm no yachtsman. I left the sea some years since, having come into some cash, but before that I was a deep-water sailor, all right. I've served before the mast, Mr.

Olson, and won every grade up to a captaincy in the Old Atlas Line. I know the sea, and its way from forecastle to after-cabin, and any time those lads forward there want to take my measure the chance is wide open. You understand?"

"I do, sir," and I thought there was more respect in the tone.

"Good; there will be no trouble tonight?"

"I think not, sir, but by morning they will begin to wonder what has become of this man McCann, and may grow ugly."

"We can handle them by daylight. It is darkness, which gives them an advantage. I'll return to the main deck, Mr. Olson, and leave you in charge here."

CHAPTER XVI

VERA STRENGTHENS MY RESOLVE

I BELIEVED I had effectually spiked the guns of the conspiracy — at least for the present. I did not underestimate the feeling of dissatisfaction forward, or the influence of Liverpool Red and his more intimate associates; but McCann and his money were, after all, the main incentive to open mutiny, and as long as I could keep that individual securely locked up aft, there remained a good chance of controlling the others.

No doubt Red, with Jim White, and possibly a couple of others, would show their hands, and require a bit of rough, sea discipline, but the majority forward were ordinary sailormen, to whom the destination of the *Indian Chief* was of small importance. They would be with whichever party on board proved the stronger. Once we succeeded in discovering the hidden store of liquor and getting it overboard, and with McCann safely secured, the danger element would certainly be greatly reduced. But was McCann really secured? I leaned against the rail, in the shadow of the cabin front, and stared forward along the deserted deck. Not a moving figure was visible; not the sound of a voice reached me. The very loneliness was oppressive, and brought with it doubt.

I could never hope to conceal the fellow, to keep him hidden. The narrow confines of the ship rendered this impossible. Dade, and the boy Moon, would be certain to carry the news of his imprisonment forward in spite of any threat. I began to suspect that McCann under lock and key, might indeed prove a greater danger in the end than he would if left free to roam on deck. I really think I should have preferred making an open fight of the affair had it been my own problem alone. But there was Bascom and the girl. The few words exchanged with McCann proved clearly that he had no feeling of mercy for his former victim. The knowledge he now possessed that this ship actually belonged to the very man crippled by his pistol shot would only serve to render the fellow more venomous. Nor could I determine his feelings toward Vera; yet if he once gained ascendancy on board, with such ruffians as Liverpool and White in control, the position of the helpless girl, alone and unprotected, would be desperate indeed. No! I would hold on to the man, and then rough it out with the others. If they ventured aft it would be at their own risk.

The cabin lamp was turned so low that scarcely the faintest reflection streamed through the glass of the companion, and I was so deeply engrossed in these reflections as to not even notice the opening of the door. Her voice at my side aroused me with a sudden thrill.

"Is this Mr. Hollis?"

"It certainly is," I answered, aware now of the dark outline beside me, and even dimly distinguishing the contour of her uplifted face. "It is some time since I

have enjoyed the pleasure of your presence on deck in the night."

"Why refer to that now?" reproachfully. "It is not so delightful a memory."

"The shipwreck — no; but the first evening we met I cannot regret. I confess I waited for you again, only to meet with disappointment."

"I remained below."

"To avoid me?"

"Why should you ask that question? I had no desire at that time to meet with the guests on board the *Esmeralda.* I told you so, Mr. Hollis, but I felt sure you would be there nevertheless, and it was to avoid you I remained below."

"But you promised to make the mystery of your presence on board clear?"

"Has it not revealed itself?"

"Not to me."

I felt her eyes search my face through the darkness as though in perplexity.

"Not to you! You mean you do not yet know?"

"Not in the least — you still remain a strange young woman, a mysterious stowaway; a nameless waif."

"But has not Philip Bascom told you who I am?"

I shook my head, not altogether happy at this introduction of his name, but unable to resent it.

"I did not ask, and doubtless he thought it entirely unnecessary to volunteer any explanation."

"But you knew he recognized me; that we had been friends."

"All the more reason why I should remain silent. As long as you evidently preferred that I should not know—"

"Oh, but I didn't, Mr. Hollis," she interrupted. "It never once occurred to me that you were still in doubt as to my identity. I—I do not wish you to feel like—like that toward me. Of course at first I thought it safer to guard my secret; I—I did not know you at all then, only by name; you were merely a guest on board my father's yacht."

"Your father's yacht! Why, of course—how stupid of me. Vera, Vera, why the name had a strangely familiar sound from the very first, but I could not recall the association; you are Gerald Carrington's daughter?"

"I am Vera Carrington. I met you once when I was only a little girl, and you gave me some flowers. I have always remembered you."

"But I supposed you to be in Europe?"

"Did papa say so? You must have misunderstood. Mother would have taken me with her, but I had so much I wanted to do in New York."

There was a moment's silence, the girl standing close against the rail, gazing out into the darkness. The fact that she was really Vera Carrington served only to add a fresh complication to the whole affair. She broke the embarrassment.

"It is so strange you should not have suspected; that no one should have told you. Why both Mr. Bascom and Mr. McCann knew me."

"Not McCann, surely?"

"Why not? We have met socially in New York. It seems hardly possible, now that I realize the true character of the man. But probably you never asked; never discussed me between you?"

"That is the truth. Of course it was quite impossible for me to question McCann, and I have seen very little of Bascom. Besides you rather threw yourself on my honor."

"On the *Esmeralda* — yes. It was necessary then, for I simply had to keep my presence a secret until we were a safe distance at sea. There were several on board who would have recognized me at once, and would have told papa. That would have spoiled everything. It was so fortunate you were the only one who chanced to see me."

"Fortunate," and I glanced about doubtfully. "It can hardly be termed that. Do you realize fully the condition to which I have already brought you?"

She turned, and I felt her hand touch mine.

"I know that you saved my life," she said earnestly. "That you protected me in the boat; that you have done, and are now doing, every duty at my request. Why, Mr. Hollis, I realize far more than you can, how all this has occurred through the mad whim of a girl. But for me you would not be here on this unlucky ship. You would be with those others rescued from the *Esmeralda* safely in New York.

"It was a girl's whim then which caused you to secrete yourself on board the yacht?"

"That and that only. I had asked to go on the voyage, and been refused. I told papa I would go in spite of all he could do to prevent it. He laughed, and that fixed the purpose firmly in my mind. It all seems silly enough now."

"It was Seeley who smuggled you aboard?"

"Yes, and I had to keep hidden until we were well at sea. The delay in the Sound made my position very unpleasant. I could only venture on deck at night, and then I encountered you. Except that I have made you so much trouble, I am not sorry." She stopped speaking, although her hand still grasped mine in apparent unconsciousness. There was barely light enough for me to perceive the outlines of her face.

"Mr. Hollis, tell me, is there real trouble on board? Is there doubt of your being able to take the *Indian Chief* into port?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because — well, I have heard things; not much, but enough to arouse suspicion. Then you had some trouble just now, and locked a man up in one of the staterooms. It was to ask you about this that I came on deck."

I laughed, endeavoring to treat the matter lightly.

"Why, I thought we were very quiet — you were not asleep?"

"No; I was lying down, but had not undressed even. Who was the man? and what had he done?"

"Our old friend Fergus McCann," I answered, deciding to be frank with her. "It was not so much what

he had done, as what he proposed doing. He was attempting to corrupt the crew forward by the use of money, and unfortunately, there are some scamps aboard only too willing to make trouble. I felt it safer to nip the scheme early."

"But what — what does Mr. McCann seek? Why should he endeavor to buy up the men? Surely he must have some object?"

"Undoubtedly; more than one I imagine, but the main reason is pure cussedness. This sea air seems to bring all that is damnable in McCann's nature to the surface. I thought him a pretty decent sort of chap of his kind when ashore. Not that he was ever a friend of mine, but I had met him in the clubs, and he seemed a genial fellow. He has developed badly enough out here, and now that I know of his connection with Bascom I am beginning to believe he is all villain under the skin."

"Yes," she insisted, "but what is his purpose now?"

"To have the *Indian Chief* returned to an American port. I'll do him the credit of saying that, until I told him a while ago, he possessed no knowledge whatever that Bascom owned the vessel, or was on board. However, he said nothing which would make me think this fact would interfere in the least with his plans. The fellow doesn't seem to know how to forgive; he encourages a spirit of revenge. He hates Bascom yet, and will be only too glad to ruin him. And he hates me, because of what occurred in the boat. This is what underlies his action no doubt; then he believes money

will accomplish anything, and he has found sailormen forward ready enough to do the dirty work, if he will only pay well for it."

"Not the whole crew! Surely he has not already succeeded in corrupting them all."

"No, probably not; but the poison is there. His argument is the peril of continuing the present voyage — the danger of capture and imprisonment. His agents preach that."

"You know them?"

"The two most prominent are Jim White, and a fellow known aboard as Liverpool Red, both typical forecastle bullies. I know how to deal with their sort."

"You — you have decided what to do then?"

"I have decided to fight it out, at least. I gave you my promise, Miss Vera, to take this ship to Hamburg if it was possible to get there."

"Without even knowing who I was?"

"Yes."

"And does it make any difference now that you do know?"

"I presume so, in a way; yet less than you might think. I realize Bascom's unfortunate condition, and my duty to serve him if possible — and also your friendship for him."

"Why do you speak in that tone?" she questioned. "Surely you do not think me more deeply interested than I should be?"

"Assuredly not; yet your request was certainly based on your personal interest in Philip Bascom. It

was not until you recognized the owner of this vessel that you expressed an interest in continuing the voyage. I left the decision entirely to you."

"You are unjust, Mr. Hollis, in — in your conclusions. Of course, Mr. Bascom's position appealed more strongly to me than it would if he had been a total stranger. That is only natural, is it not? I knew the circumstances, the conditions; I remembered those dependent upon him. It would have been cowardly for me not to respond."

"It was not Philip Bascom alone, then?"

"You have no excuse for that question, yet I will answer you. It was not Philip Bascom alone. But if he had stood alone in my mind, the decision would have been exactly the same. I knew him when he was strong, well and prosperous. I was only a girl then, but he was very kind and considerate. I am not one to desert a friend, Mr. Hollis. I like Philip Bascom, if that is what you wish to know; I like him very much indeed. Does this acknowledgment have any effect on your decision?"

"It does not," I said honestly. "If it did I should have to revise my whole estimate of your character."

"But," she insisted, "it was not my choice which determined your taking command of the *Indian Chief*. You were willing and ready to do so out of sympathy for the owner — Philip Bascom. Your only hesitancy was over my willingness to accompany you on the voyage. I merely consented to your plan. Is this not true?"

"Yes — in the form you put it."

"Which means that you still think my interest greater than I choose to confess. Well, why argue over that? You have no right to draw such a conclusion."

She stopped suddenly, as though realizing all at once where our controversy was leading us. Then she faced me in the dim light.

"I am certainly sorry our conversation has taken this course, Mr. Hollis," she said more quietly. "There is no need of any misunderstanding, and if there is one, it is surely through no fault of mine. Philip Bascom is merely my friend — scarcely that, indeed, except through a memory of girlhood. I — I really do not know why this should make any difference with you; yet, surely, you will believe me?"

"I do, and regret if my words have led you to think otherwise. It is still your desire that we continue the voyage?"

"My desire! Is there any other way of saving the investment in this vessel and cargo?"

"I know of none."

"Then we must go on, must we not? I — I hope you will, Captain Hollis."

Before I could stop her, or add another word, she was gone, and I was apparently alone on the deck.

CHAPTER XVII

THE NEW DAY BEGINS

I REMAINED on deck the greater part of the night, but nothing of an alarming nature took place. The crew remained quiet, and the watch on duty obeyed orders promptly enough to give those of us aft a new feeling of confidence. When Leayord relieved Olson at midnight, the three of us discussed the situation together before the second mate went below and decided to make no further move until the men openly declared themselves. Both officers agreed with me, that, as soon as the knowledge of McCann's arrest reached the forecastle, there would be trouble if it was possible for Liverpool and White to get the backing of the others in revolt. But as to how serious the spirit of mutiny already was, we had no absolute means of knowing. Leayord seemed to be a clear-headed, sensible fellow, and I agreed with his summing up of the situation.

"It's like this, Mr. Hollis," he said soberly. "We've got to let those fellows decide first what they intend to do. Thar's nothing happened, so far as I can see, to cause us to kick up any particular shindy. The crew are doin' their work, and the only special trouble aboard comes from whisky, and the money of that guy you've got locked up down below. I'm for holdin' on to him, and, when it gets daylight, makin' a search for

the booze. Of course, when Liverpool and his gang find out that their precious backer is in limbo, they're naturally bound to do some kickin', but that won't be till morning, and, unless they get the whole bunch forrard on their side, I reckon we can handle 'em all right. My way would be to wait, and see what turns up, sir, an' then, if them fellers really want trouble, jump in and give 'em all they want."

"Good sea philosophy, Mr. Leayord," I answered heartily. "I'll stay on deck for an hour or so yet, and then lie down. Mr. Olson, you'd better get what rest you can. Personally, I do not anticipate any demonstration forward until after I can take an observation, and the men learn where we are, and what part of the sea we are heading into. It's not likely the leaders in this row have told the others about the money, is it? They are keeping all that hid, and working the war racket."

"No doubt of it, sir. And we're surely goin' on to Hamburg?"

"That is my intention."

Olson turned away, but paused a moment at the head of the ladder.

"Maybe it's not my place, sir, to speak," he ventured doubtfully. "But there's sure to be trouble when the crew finds that is the course set. They are sure stirred up over gettin' thrown into them French and English prisons. Somebody's been stuffing 'em good an' proper. I've got most of it from the men at the wheel."

"You believe they will mutiny?"

"Aye, if they have the leaders, and Liverpool and White would go a hell of a long ways for ten thousand dollars, sir."

"And you, Mr. Leayord?"

"Olson knows them better than I do, sir," the first mate answered slowly. "But I reckon sailormen are all about alike. Between the fear of bein' captured on this job, an' that damn money, thar's liable to be quite a fire started up there in the fo'castle. We've got our work cut out for us already if the port is Hamburg."

"Well, that's the port. You might as well understand it now, and tomorrow I'll make it equally clear to the crew. The one and only thing I want to know is, do my officers stand with me?"

In the darkness the eyes of the two sought the vague outlines of each other, but for the moment neither answered.

"Well, Mr. Leayord?"

"When I came aft, sir," he said honestly, "I expected to do my duty. I ain't changed none since."

"And you, Mr. Olson?"

"It's pretty safe to put me down against Liverpool, no matter what the row is about. I'm for Hamburg, sir, if that's where you an' the owner wants to take this hooker."

"I have never failed to win out yet, while my officers remained loyal," I said quietly, greatly heartened by the way they expressed themselves. "I am convinced that Masters is all right; so we will consider our course

settled. Take your watch below, Mr. Olson; it will be all hands at daylight."

The sky cleared, although the wind remained fresh and the sea heavy enough to keep two men at the wheel. The *Indian Chief* made good weather of it, however, and I possessed faith in Leayord's seamanship. For an hour, perhaps, I loitered about on deck, but all remained so quiet that finally, with a word to the mate to have me called at the slightest sign of need, I went below, and turned in.

I did not remove my clothes, and the new day was barely reddening the east when I was aroused by a trampling of feet on the deck overhead. There was no call, and I was sailor enough to comprehend what was going on above — the watch was about to be changed, and Leayord was using all hands in cleaning ship. The activity, the quietly spoken orders, the low chant of a song as the men toiled at a rope, were evidence that my presence was not required, and I felt it would please both officers to be left alone in charge. I opened the port and looked out at the glorious morning. It was a lonely ocean scene, yet wildly beautiful — the huge gray surges white-capped and threatening, the red sun splitting asunder a mass of black cloud, its rays leaping from crest to crest as though they were balls of fire. Everywhere was the wild desolation of the sea, nothing on which the eye could rest except the restless waves, the constant shifting of colors. Satisfied that no other vessel was within range of vision, I lay down again.

I do not recall a pleasanter meal at sea than our

breakfast that morning. All were in excellent humor, and no premonition of trouble entered our minds. The night had passed quietly, both officers reporting the crew docile and cheerful. Bascom did not appear, but Miss Carrington smilingly took her place, evidently refreshed by a night's rest. No reference was made to our peculiar situation, or to the dangerous voyage confronting us, the conversation tending toward humor, stimulated by an odd dream which the young woman related with great enjoyment. Even the two seamen forgot their embarrassment in laughter, and gave us some reminiscences of the forecastle, quaintly entertaining. Dade and the boy Moon hung about listening, pretending to be busy, and the bright sunshine streamed down through the opening above, flooding the dingy cabin with golden sheen. I remember how a shaft touched the girl's hair, giving it a new beauty, and how merrily her laugh rang out at an absurd tale I told.

Olson was on watch, but Masters joined us at table, and reported all well in the engine room, and together we drank a toast to a pleasant voyage, almost convinced that before us were only the ordinary vicissitudes of the sea. It was not until the men left the table that I was reminded of our prisoner in the nearby stateroom. Even then I lingered a moment, interested in the girl, who seemed in no hurry to leave the cabin. She promised to sing for me that evening, and together we looked over the music in the rack, laying aside those pieces which were familiar. The table had been cleared when we finally separated.

"Mr. Bascom seldom takes any breakfast?" I said to Dade, who was polishing the stair rail.

"No, sir; I have orders to take him a cup of coffee at nine o'clock."

"And how about McCann?"

"The gentleman in number six, sir? He's locked in, and I haven't the key."

"That's true; I'd forgotten. I'll look in on the man; and you get his breakfast ready to serve."

I unlocked and opened the door. McCann was seated on the edge of his bunk facing me, and, it was plainly evident at first view that he was in no pleasant humor. He had the appearance of having passed a disagreeable night, and for an instant I felt a twinge of regret because of handling the fellow so roughly.

"McCann," I said, as he failed to speak, "let's have an understanding. It is no desire of mine to hold you a prisoner here for the next month. I'll accept your pledge not to interfere with the working of this vessel."

"On what other terms?"

"That you stop holding communications with the crew, and consider yourself a passenger until the end of the voyage. Give me your word to that, and you may have the freedom of this cabin, and the after deck."

"What is the voyage?"

"To Hamburg."

He laughed, and there was an ugly sound to it.

"Hell, do you think you will ever get there?" he asked, glaring at me, but making no effort to rise. "Are you fool enough, Hollis, to imagine that the

English fleet will ever permit this ship to pass through the channel? Why, your whole damn cargo, they tell me, is contraband."

"Who tells you?"

"Never mind who. It's the truth, isn't it?"

"Yes, you might as well know — mostly munitions of war, but contracted for months before war was declared. However, I am not fool enough to suppose we can make the channel passage. There will be risk enough at the best, but we'll try it north of the Shetlands, and through the North Sea. However, that's nothing to do with your status on board. It is nothing to you, is it, who gets the cargo, or where it is finally landed?"

"It is something to me whether I'm safe in New York, or rotting in an English, or French prison," he said sullenly. "Besides, that's not all. In the first place, I was a fool to ever accept Carrington's invitation to go on his yachting trip. I wouldn't if I hadn't supposed it to be a short cruise. I've got to get back to New York, I tell you, man. I've got a deal on there that means more than a million dollars! I can't afford to drift about out here on this rotten tramp."

"The saving of this boat and cargo means more to Bascom than your million dollar trade does to you."

"What's Bascom's affairs to me?" he sneered. "He took his chances, didn't he? You seem to think I owe the man something. I suppose he told you, or else the girl did, that I crippled him for life. Well, he deserved all he got. I pay my debts, let me tell you, and I've

got some against you to be settled yet. Don't preach Philip Bascom to me. It's not for his sake you are hanging on here, and trying to get this ship to Hamburg. I'm not so blind as all that."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean! Why that is Carrington's girl, isn't it, you and I pulled out of the yacht? Lord, I knew her when the first streak of daylight came, and I saw your little game, too. There's money enough coming to her to make this a mighty profitable voyage if you can land her in your net before she gets ashore again. By God! I might have done it myself if I hadn't gone crazy in the boat. Now all the part there is left me to play is the villain."

"And you think that accounts for my taking command of this ship?"

"Of course. Everything has worked fine for you so far. Saved the girl's life; protected her in the small boat from a brute, that's me; and now, at her request, because of her desire to serve Philip Bascom, you graciously consent to guide the *Indian Chief* to Hamburg, and a fortune. Why, it's the greatest little story that ever was — the fair maiden, the stalwart hero, the scheming villain, the pale-faced sufferer, and over and above all, the gleaming of gold — papa's gold. Bah! it makes me sick!"

I did not move, or take my eyes from him, and slowly the grin on his face seemed to smooth out, as his sense of humor departed.

"Well," he snarled, "isn't that about the way of it?"

"If the picture satisfies you, Mr. McCann," I said, "you are perfectly welcome to it. Probably no other point of view is possible to your sort of mind, so any further discussion would only be a waste of time. However, you've said enough to cause me to withdraw my offer of parole. I will accept no pledge you may make."

"You intend holding me a prisoner as long as I am aboard?"

"You have left me no other choice."

He got to his feet angrily. "Well now see here, Hollis, I'm damned if I have any use for you, or any of your outfit! I wouldn't give you my word even if you agreed to accept it. You are going to discover before you are through with me that Fergus McCann is not quite as big a fool as you take him to be. I'll give you odds that you never take this ship to Hamburg; I'll give you odds you never get the girl; yes, damn you! I'll make the same proposition, that you'll never hold me prisoner twenty-four hours. Are you sport enough to take me?"

I glanced back across my shoulder, only to see reflected in a mirror, Vera Carrington, standing in the half-opened door of her stateroom, as though suddenly arrested by the sound of our voices. No one else was visible in the cabin.

"Dade."

"Aye, aye, sir," his voice coming from out the forward passage.

"Bring Mr. McCann's breakfast, if it is ready."

"Yes, sir; all ready, sir."

He came forward with it on a tray, and I stepped aside to permit him to pass through the door, carefully keeping my back turned toward the motionless girl, and my eyes fastened on McCann.

"Leave the tray there on the stool, Dade — yes, that's all; you may go back to your work."

He backed out, but stood hesitating, while I closed and locked the door, dropping the key into my pocket.

"Is — is that all, sir?" he asked nervously.

"I told you it was. When I want those dishes removed, I'll come down, and unlock the door for you. No one — not even you — are to speak with the prisoner. It will be well for you to remember that, Dade, and keep your eyes open."

"Yes, sir."

"Now go forward, about your work."

"Very well, sir."

I watched until he vanished in the passage, not altogether satisfied. The fellow had been outwardly respectful enough, but there was something indefinite about his manner which aroused my doubt. I turned, and confronted the young woman, wondering vaguely how long she had been there, and how much of our conversation she had overheard.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MEASURE OF DANGER

WE were alone, and as our eyes met, she advanced toward me across the deck, her hand extended.

"I was only there for a moment, Captain Hollis," she explained quietly, as though in answer to the silent inquiry of my face. "I was going on deck for a breath of air, and when I opened the door heard my own name spoken. Quite naturally I listened."

"Which you had every right to do. I endeavored to get from McCann a pledge not to interfere with the discipline of the ship, and offered him the freedom of the cabin and after deck, if he would make such a promise."

"And he refused?"

"Emphatically; he even accused me of unworthy motives — you heard that?"

She shook her head. "I hardly think so; I heard him offer odds against your ever bringing the *Indian Chief* into that German port, and — oh, yes, and something about your not getting the girl — what girl?"

I smiled, decidedly relieved by the lack of embarrassment in her manner.

"Have we so many of your sex on board," I asked, "as to leave that in any doubt?"

"He — he referred to me! Why I thought it

might be something which had occurred on shore — in New York. Whatever was it he said?"

"Just a bit of ugliness that flashed out of him, Miss Vera. It is not worth repeating."

"You will not tell me, then?"

"Why perhaps it may be better for me to tell, rather than leave you to imagine. It seems the fellow guessed who you were in the boat — no doubt had seen you before, and recognized your face as soon as it became daylight. Then, however, it was too late for him to disguise his real self as he had revealed it. His actions had made you despise him, and turn to me for protection. Naturally the man judges my motives from his own standpoint."

"Yes — but in this case, what do you mean?"

"Why money is his world; he has been taught nothing else — get money, no matter how. He is aware that I am not extremely wealthy — indeed not wealthy at all by his standards, and that you are your father's daughter. Because I serve you, is, to his mind, proof positive of a mercenary purpose on my part — that is all."

Her eyes widened, and there was a glow of color in her cheeks.

"But — but you have done no more than any gentleman would."

"Nothing more; but perhaps he cannot understand that; besides he spoke in anger, and, really, you know his opinion is nothing which needs bother either of us. Only I am rather glad you did not hear his words."

"He — he insinuated that you sought to — to win my gratitude for some reward?"

"Yes."

"That my father would pay for your kindness to me?"

"Well, Miss Vera," and I found it extremely hard to choose words, "his thoughts were more direct."

Her face brightened, a sudden gleam of humor in her eyes.

"Oh, that you wanted to marry me! Isn't it too funny! Do you really think he supposes that true?"

"I would not be at all surprised," I answered, not altogether pleased at her reception of this suspicion. "It is wholly in line with his type. To me, now, the wealth of your father would be the greatest barrier between us."

"There was a time when you never knew I had a wealthy father, or indeed any other kind."

"Was I any the less attentive then?" I retorted. "I recall almost an entire night passed on deck in the vague hope of seeing you."

She laughed, but flashed her eyes up into my face.

"Did you, really? I wondered if you were there. I should have come out just to see, if poor Mr. Seeley had not locked the door. But then that was merely curiosity."

"The mystery was attractive, I confess, but I am not at all sure there was not a growing personal interest also. You can scarcely conceive the impression you left on me in the moonlight."

"Please, no compliments. I am so accustomed to those in New York I cannot appreciate them any more. Besides, think where we are — far at sea, on a tramp steamer, laden with contraband, with a half-mutinous crew forward, and a long voyage ahead. Have I not enough to bear without that?"

"You refuse to take me seriously?"

"I refuse to have our trip spoiled by your thinking you must say nice things to me. Please! We have been such good friends, and I must trust you utterly. You will not forget, Mr. Hollis, that I am alone here, the only woman aboard, with no protector except you."

"The situation is not quite as serious as that, Miss Vera," I interposed, assuming a sudden cheerfulness. "There are others on board to be counted on. Philip Bascom certainly, and Leayord impresses me as a real man."

"Yes, but nevertheless it is upon you that all depends," she answered swiftly. "Mr. Leayord is only a sailor, and — and Philip Bascom is — is only a gentleman. It is because you are both, that I possess such faith in you."

"Faith — in me?"

"Of course. If I had not possessed such faith in your seamanship, in your manhood, I could never have consented to the continuance of this voyage. Surely you must comprehend this, Mr. Hollis. In a measure you left the decision to me — and I made the choice. Why? In the hope that we might thus avert ruin from the Bascoms. Very true, yet if you had not been on

board, capable and willing to assume command, I should never have so decided. It was my knowledge of you, my faith in you, which led to this adventure."

"Your knowledge, at least, was extremely limited; but I am thankful for your faith."

"Not so limited as you may think, Captain Hollis," and a smile brightened the soberness of her face. "I have heard my father speak of you, and once I listened spellbound to a tale of your seamanship."

"Of mine — impossible."

"Far from it; this was told by the lips of one who witnessed the incident. Did you ever know a Walter Hale?"

"Hale? Certainly; he was second mate on the *Mattawan*."

"And you were first mate. Well I heard him tell my father how you brought that ship under jury masts into Rangoon after the captain had been washed overboard — a thousand miles across the Indian Ocean, with a coolie crew. You were only twenty-two years old then, Mr. Hale said, but the coolest lad he ever saw on a ship's deck."

"Why," I protested, "it was Hale himself who made that job possible."

"I like to hear you say that — as if you actually meant it, too. It is my guess you both did your duty. But I was just a girl then, snuggled down in one corner of my father's library, utterly forgotten by the men as they talked. The story fascinated me; no doubt it was a commonplace enough tale of the sea, but to me it

possessed all the wonder of romance. The memory was with me for years, and came up afresh whenever your name was mentioned. Why," and she laughed, a dimple showing in her cheek, as she glanced up into my face, "when you told me who you were that night on the *Esmeralda*, such a thrill ran through me I could scarcely speak. It is silly of me to confess this; but — but it was like meeting suddenly a character from out the pages of fiction. You — you had never seemed quite real to me before."

"Yet you told me you knew I was one of the passengers."

"Yes, Mr. Seeley gave me a list of those invited; but I had no knowledge of your appearance — "

"Oh, I see; that then was the shock — it must have been a severe one."

"A subject on which I refuse to be interviewed at present," she answered brightly, swept by a new mood. "But, at least, I had no reason to be deeply disappointed in your character. I can trust you, Captain Hollis, and I do; surely you can ask no more than that?"

"No; and I will remember. You were going on deck?"

"For a short time; it would seem a beautiful morning."

We emerged from the companion together, but she lingered at the rail, as I clambered up the ladder and greeted Leayord aft of the wheel. It was a broad sea-view revealed on every side, nothing in sight but the

crested waves sweeping to the distant horizons. The swell was heavy from the storm of the night before, but the *Indian Chief* met them buoyantly in spite of the heavily laden hull, shipping scarce a bucket of water over her lea rail, as her sharp bow plunged into the hollows. Except for a bank of filmy cloud off the port bow, the sky was clear, but of a misty blue which made me dubious of continued pleasant weather, although the wind had become light, with barely enough force to belly our sails, and blew steadily from the southwest. The only men I saw were on the forecastle engaged in clearing up some tackle, excepting a fellow high up in the main crosstrees, with binoculars at his eyes.

"You keep a good lookout, I see, Mr. Leayord," I said, peering up at the figure outlined against the sky. "Whose glasses?"

"Probably belonged to the first mate, sir," he answered. "I found them in my stateroom, and thought it just as well to watch for inquisitive neighbors. I hope I did right, sir?"

"Exactly. I would have suggested it, but was detained below. Who have you aloft?"

"Simms, sir; he has the best pair of eyes in my watch."

"Nothing reported?"

"Not yet, sir. Mr. Olson said it was all quiet while he was in charge."

He moved over to the starboard rail, with a glance at the wheelsman, and I joined him, understanding the movement.

"Your purpose is to avoid vessels if possible, I presume, Captain?" he asked, pointing out across the water in pretense at admiring the scene.

"The fewer we meet with the pleasanter our voyage, Mr. Leayord," quietly. "By the way, your language is hardly that of a forecastle hand; seemingly it has changed over night."

He permitted a smile to curve his lips.

"Environment, sir, no doubt. As bosun, I was a bit careless, but now that I've come aft, the speech of a gentleman seems more appropriate. The fact is I had two years at Eton, sir."

"Ah, indeed! Well, I'm not sorry for that. It will make our relations aft much more congenial. You are English born then, I take it."

"Yes, sir; a Bristol man."

"This running of a contraband cargo to Germany can hardly be altogether to your liking?"

He spat over the rail, and drew the sleeve of his jacket across his lips, as his eyes met mine.

"'Twould be more of a pleasure, I admit, Captain, to be putting over a trick for the other side," he answered, his fingers nervously gripping the rail, "but I shipped for this voyage fair enough, and I always held it a sailor's duty to stick to his ship. Once I'm through with this job, sir, and I'll do my hearty bit for old England."

"Well said, Mr. Leayord," and I gripped his hand. "So far as I understand this row, my sympathies are all on your side. I may as well explain to you that I

have been induced to assume command because of the condition in which I found the owner."

"Mr. Bascom, sir?"

"Yes; as you must know, the man is a helpless cripple, and his entire fortune is represented by the cargo in this vessel."

"He is a friend of the lady's, sir, I heard Dade say."

"Yes, they knew each other ashore when she was a young — girl. It was odd enough for them to have met out here again, but stranger still is the fact that this fellow McCann, whom I have locked up below, should have been the cause of Bascom's present condition."

"You don't say, sir."

"That is the story as Miss Vera Carrington tells it. I have got very little out of Bascom, although I remember the newspaper accounts published at the time. There was a shooting affray, in a New York restaurant, over some woman."

"McCann shot him, and got away?"

"Bought his way clear."

"He is rich then?"

"The fellow has more money than you and I will ever see, Mr. Leayord. He's in the only place now where it can do him no good."

The mate shook his head doubtfully, his eyes wandering toward the men at the wheel.

"I wish I was so cocksure of that, sir," he said soberly. "There's some mighty bad blood forward on this ship, and it's my judgment we're not out of the mess yet by a long ways. Those wolves have got a

scent of McCann's gold, and they'll never leave the trail until they get it."

"You mean Liverpool and White?"

"Well, they're the main guys, sir. But there are others ready enough to follow them."

"They have only McCann's word for his ability to pay."

"Not them; the fellow has a belt on, with a bunch of the real stuff. I have it from Dade, sir, that he's scattered a thousand already, just to prove that he's got it."

"But you don't think they would actually attempt mutiny?"

"They're not calling it that, sir. It's the cargo aboard, and your determination to land it safe at Hamburg, which is going to make the trouble. There is only one German in the crew, sir — the rest are all English and Swede, except a couple of niggers. The Swedes and niggers will do whatever the others tell 'em to, an' the argument forward, according to Dade, is, that it'll be no crime to capture this ship, and run her into an English port. That's the talk Liverpool and White are putting up in the forecastle — they naturally aim to hog all that money themselves, an' get off scot free. Red even suggested to Olson that he come in on the scheme, and accept a third."

"What did Olson say?"

"Well, sir, Olson is all right. Liverpool didn't come out square with the proposition, so that the second mate could knock him down; he just hinted at it easy

like, and Olson told him politely to go to hell, an' later reported it to me. But that shows us the way the wind is blowing, sir."

"The men seem quiet enough."

"They're not ready yet, but hell will break loose presently, according to my notions. Wait until they hear what has happened to McCann."

"Well," I said deliberately, "we shall have to meet whatever comes, Mr. Leayord. I talked with McCann again this morning, and offered him his freedom aft if he would promise to keep away from the crew. He refused to accept parole, so I locked him up again. Do you suggest any other course?"

"No, sir, I don't," he said slowly, after a pause for thought. "It's likely to amount to the same thing either way we turn, but it's to our advantage to have that fellow in our own hands." He lifted his eyes inquiringly to my face. "This Miss Carrington now, by any chance is she the same lady these two men got to shooting about?"

"No, she was not involved in the quarrel. The fact is she was only a young girl when she knew Bascom, and McCann had never met her personally until we escaped from the wreck of the yacht together."

"She was a passenger, also?"

"In a way, yes," feeling no necessity for any further explanation. "She was the owner's daughter."

"Then she's rich, too?"

"Her father is one of New York's multi-millionaires. What difference does that make, Mr. Leayord?"

"Nothing much, likely," he answered, leaning against the rail, his eyes on the distant bank of cloud, "only maybe we might play money against money in this game, with a fair chance to win. I reckon gold, no matter where it comes from, would look good to those devils forward."

"Scarcely a manly act on our part to suggest such a thing."

"Well, I don't know about that, sir," he insisted stubbornly. "I reckon old man Carrington would be willing enough to pay the price, rather than have his girl left in the hands of those fellows. They'll be no lambs if they ever get control of the ship. But maybe you know best, sir."

CHAPTER XIX

THE LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE

I LEFT him and walked forward to where I could look down on the main deck. Vera must have already retired to the cabin, as she was not visible, the boy Moon alone appearing below me on his way to the cook's galley. As deeply as I despised the thought of ever resorting to this last suggestion made by Leayord, yet I could not remain entirely indifferent to its possibilities. If matters on board were, indeed, as serious as he pictured them, our situation was far from pleasant. To keep on probably meant a battle to preserve the ship, and involved not only our own rough handling, even possible death in the melee, but also unspeakable horror to the woman left alone, and unprotected, on board. What would be her fate, if we failed to uphold discipline, and those unbridled ruffians once obtained control of the vessel? The thought staggered me.

McCann — even if he desired to do so, and I sincerely doubted the desire — would be utterly helpless in the grip of those lawless spirits whom he had unchained. They would merely laugh at him. Even if, through the influence of his wealth, he retained supremacy and a measure of control, would not the fellow himself use his power for evil? The suggestion he had dropped of a desire to gain influence over the girl,

and, through her, profit in her father's millions, left on my mind little doubt as to what he would attempt openly if the opportunity presented itself. And if he was left alone with her on board — the only man who even faintly represented her social class; the only one to whom she could hope to appeal — there was a chance for him to erase from her mind the memory of past brutality, and build up a new conception of his character by becoming her protector. Nor did I doubt he had the subtlety to do this, and play the part to absolute perfection. The man was not devoid of brains, or the ways of social refinement. If under the stress of danger, and the hardships of unaccustomed environment, he had reverted to his true type, he still retained the veneer of outward form, and could easily assume, if occasion warranted, the semblance of a gentleman.

To my thought he was the most to be feared of all those aboard, and the least to be trusted. Long sea training had taught me how efficiently to deal with the others; they were of a type easily understood, to be mastered by stern discipline, and driven to their duty; but this fellow McCann, wealthy, ruined by flattery, controlled by unbridled desire, would never respond to such methods. Neither persuasion, nor fear, would suffice to turn him from his course or change his bitter hatred into respect.

Yet I could reach no other conclusion except to continue the voyage, meeting its problems as they presented themselves. There was no turning back now. I had pledged my word, openly announced my intention for-

ward as well as aft, and to retract would brand my action as cowardly. Once I relaxed my grip, confessed my weakness, it would cost me all influence over the crew. It would give them the upper hand, and be equivalent to complete surrender. All hope lay in keeping McCann prisoner, entirely isolated from his confederates, and dealing with the men forward with a harsh firmness sufficient to strike terror into their souls. The slightest movement of revolt on their part must be my signal for action. There could be no compromising, no hesitancy, no tenderness. The fate of the ship, the very life of Vera Carrington, rested on my decision, and the swift resourcefulness of my action. I felt equal to the task.

The morning wore away with no demonstration of any kind, the *Indian Chief* bowling along freely on the course set, but at half-speed. The watch was busied at various tasks about decks, and seemingly exhibited no interest in anything except their duties. I watched them closely, but could detect no sign of uneasiness, or conspiracy. None of the watch below emerged from the forecastle, nor did the men collect in groups, or exhibit any special interest in affairs aft. Nor could I detect any evidence of drunkenness among them, and Olson, after a trip forward to tighten one of the jibs, reported them as all sober, and quick to obey his orders. We decided, therefore, that the stock of liquor must be exhausted, and it would be extremely foolish on our part to arouse the animosity of the men by any search.

The day held fair, with a stiff breeze blowing over the port quarter, and the expanse of sea about us vacant of either sail or smoke. Not once did the lookout in the main crosstrees hail the deck, and I grew weary of the changeless view, as I continued to pace from rail to rail, watchful of every movement, yet gradually becoming satisfied that the peril of mutiny had greatly diminished. Miss Vera did not venture again on deck, nor had I any glimpse of Bascom. Twice I peered down through the skylight into the cabin beneath, but without gaining sight of either.

As noon approached I had Dade fetch the sextant from the captain's stateroom, and took my observation with considerable care, going below to work out my figures alone, as the many years passed ashore had left me a bit doubtful of my facility. No one appeared to take any deep interest in the event, although I noted a group of men forward watching as I disappeared. Their interest, however, had merely the appearance of a natural curiosity, and left no impression on my mind. As the ship had been drifting for days, it was natural enough for all aboard to speculate as to where we were.

With nothing to guide me, or check my figures with on the chart, I went over them twice to be assured of accuracy, finally marking our position as carefully as possible, and determining our future course. Leayord had just been called for his watch, and both officers were upon the after deck, waiting for my appearance. They remained silent as I approached, and, as I turned and faced forward, my eyes observed a largely increased

grouping of men about the forecastle, and all staring aft.

"Are both watches on deck, Mr. Leayord?" I asked. "Has there been any call for all hands?"

"No, sir," he answered, his own gaze shifting. "It's the change of watch, and the second mate's men haven't gone below yet. Maybe the cook is slow, or else they are a bit curious to find out where the ship is, sir. Would you mind giving them the figures?"

"Not at all; the wheelsman would spread the news fast enough as soon as relieved. We are at fifty-two degrees, thirty-five minutes west longitude, and forty degrees, ten minutes north latitude, approximately. I am not exactly sure as to the chronometer, but practically these figures are correct."

"And where does that put us from New York?"

"About five hundred miles, a little north of east; Halifax is the nearest port, two hundred and seventy-five miles nor' nor' by west. We are between the North Atlantic steamer lanes, and the direct course to the Mediterranean, more in line with the Azores, I should say. That accounts for the deserted sea — we're out of the beaten track."

"The big liners pass to the north of us?"

"Yes, from fifty to a hundred miles; under good steam we could cross their track in a night."

"And that would be your plan, sir?"

"Well, I know of no better one. Except for fishing craft we would be scarce likely to encounter any vessels amid that desolation to the north. They would have

no opportunity to report us, and as soon as our latitude was safe, we could take a direct easterly course above the Shetlands."

"There is a northern passenger line."

"All slow boats, and neutral. There will be little danger until we encounter the English trawlers in the North Sea."

"Is that the chart, sir? Olson and I would understand better if we had a look at it — the figures don't mean much to us."

I spread it open on the skylight, holding it flat with one hand and a pair of compasses, and the two mates bent over in earnest study of the lines. The men at the wheel beyond us endeavored also to gain a glimpse, as I reached forward to point out our present position in the blank space of water.

"This red cross is about where the ship is now," I explained, "with our course a point north o' east. Just before night we'll shift to the north, get up full steam, and make a run for it."

"And what may be all these lines, sir?"

"The regular sailing lanes between North Europe and the American ports."

"We cross them in the night?"

"That is the plan; if we can accomplish that unobserved, we'll have a clear ocean for a while, at least."

"And what would you say would be your highest north, Captain Hollis?"

"At about fifty degrees latitude, for the west coast, and then a course to the northeast. That would place

us in here, off the north coast of Newfoundland. Have either of you ever been in those seas?"

Both men shook their heads soberly, Leayord saying:

"Not I, sir. I made one voyage to Quebec, but we never came that far north. However, I should say, there wasn't likely to be much shipping in those waters."

"No — only fishing schooners. We may not raise a sail all the way across. One thing is certain, there can be no occasion for English warships to be patrolling those seas — they'll have their work cut out for them farther south. What have you to say to the plan?"

The two straightened up, and looked at each other, and Leayord crossed to the rail, and spat overboard.

"Well, I don't know how there could be a better one, sir," he answered coming back, wiping his lips. "If we're really going to Hamburg, the longest way round seems like the safest for us to travel. Isn't that your idea, Olson?"

The second mate nodded.

"How's the coal, sir?"

"All but one bunker full yet; we'll not steam heavy except tonight."

"Personally I don't see any objection to making a try of it," Leayord added, "but I don't know how the crew may feel. This isn't exactly the sort of voyage they shipped for."

"We may as well test them first as last," I said determined to have it over with. "Both watches are mostly on deck. Have the bosun call them aft."

The fellows responded quickly enough, a few slouch-

ing along in pretended indifference, but the majority exhibiting a real interest. I stood between the two mates at the rail watching them closely, but the uplifted faces told me little as to their disposition, although I confess the general impression was that of sullen rebellion. It was a motley throng, and they stared up at us in silence; the only noise was the restless movement of feet and the singing of wind in the rigging overhead. All about us stretched the blue domain of the sea, the heaving surges tipped with crests of foam, and above a few flying clouds. Liverpool Red stood directly below me, a step in advance of his mates. His cap hid his eyes, but there was an ugly, defiant grin on his face, which angered me.

"Well, men," I said, wasting no time in soft phrasing. "I've called you aft for a straight talk. You shipped on the *Indian Chief* for a voyage to Hamburg—"

"To hell we did," a voice interrupted. "The most of us wus shanghaied and brought aboard drunk."

"That has nothing to do with me," I replied sharply. "I was not skipper then; but I am now. Your names are on the papers regularly enough, and the only thing I need to explain is the necessity for a change in our sailing course. As most of you know, war has broken out in Europe since this ship cleared from Baltimore. The chances are about a hundred to one that we would be captured, or sunk, if we tried to reach our port through the Channel."

"By whom?" It was Liverpool who spoke.

"English or French warships."

"It's a damn Dutch cargo then we've got in the hold. That's the way I figured it. Well, now look here, sir, Smitz is the only Dutchman aboard, an' the rest ov us don't take kindly to that sort o' job."

"You're sailormen, and shipped on this voyage before ever war was declared. Now will you listen to me until I get through?"

"Ah, let him talk, Red," someone interjected. "What we want to know is where we are, an' the course we're sailing on."

"That's the ticket, Bill," chimed in another. "Let the blooming war slide till we find out whut's the program. We'll hear yer, sir."

I outlined my plan in as few words as possible, and they seemed to listen respectfully enough, only occasionally interjecting a question. Liverpool did not speak at all, nor Jim White, who had pushed his way forward, until I concluded. Then the latter asked suddenly:

"Would you mind if a couple of us had a glance at that chart? Maybe we'd see it clearer then."

"Certainly, you can all look at it. Mr. Olson, take the chart down there, and point out the lines so the men can see where we are."

They crowded about, endeavoring to gain a glimpse, although probably not half a dozen among them possessed the faintest conception of what the various markings signified. Liverpool and White, however, got down on their knees, and followed Olson's stubby forefinger

closely, as he traced the proposed course. White appeared rather the more intelligent, asking a question or two before regaining his feet.

"I was on the Labrador Coast once, sir," he said, turning his face toward where I stood waiting, "but that don't help me much to get this thing straight. It's to be a north course tonight then, so as to take us through the steamer lane before daylight?"

"Yes."

"And after that we'll still steam north — for how far, sir?"

"Until satisfied that we are safely beyond any stray vessel driven out of her course — to about fifty degrees north I had it figured. Mr. Olson pointed it out to you."

"Yes, sir; I see the spot, although it don't mean much to me. And where would we be about daylight tomorrow morning?"

"I can only guess at that, not knowing the exact shape our engines are in, or the probable speed of the ship. But we ought to be close to fifty degrees west and about forty degrees, twenty minutes north, I should say."

"How far away from land?"

"One hundred and fifty miles to the east and south of Cape Race."

"Cape Race!" broke in Liverpool. "I've heard o' that point — it's south of a harbor called St. John's. Here it is, marked on the chart, Jim."

He pointed it out with a dingy forefinger, and the two

stared at the spot for a minute before they got to their feet again. I waited, but neither spoke.

"Is that all, men?" I asked with a glance at their faces. "All right then, you can go forward. If any of you wish to ask any questions later I shall be glad to answer them."

They disappeared without demonstration, talking among themselves, yet to all appearances the conference had not deeply impressed the crew. They seemed a stolid, dull-witted bunch, even Liverpool and White slouching back to the forecastle, with scarcely the exchange of a word. Olson rolled up the chart, and clambered up the ladder to where I stood beside the first mate. For a moment he clung to the rail watching the last of the men disappear.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said almost under his breath.

"What is it, Mr. Olson?"

"That's just what I don't know, sir," he answered slowly. "But this beats me. I naturally thought those lads would raise particular hell, an' instead they are so many lambs. There's something wrong when sailormen are afraid to even grumble."

"I must say I do not like it myself, sir," added Leayord soberly. "There's something in the wind. Did you notice, sir, not one of them asked about what had become of McCann?"

"He may not have been missed yet."

"Oh, he's missed all right; the word has gone forward before this time. It's my opinion, sir, this whole

matter has been thrashed out already in the forecastle, an' those bullies have made up their minds just what they're goin' to do."

"Well, what can they do?"

"One guess is as good as another, sir, but I'm mighty near certain of one thing — they haven't no intention of goin' to Hamburg. Even Liverpool and White showed no interest, except in one point."

"You mean where the ship will be tomorrow morning?"

"Just that; and it's going to be tomorrow morning when they show their hand. Till then, sir, we'll have a model crew. That's the way I see it."

"Which theory looks reasonable enough," I acknowledged, after a pause, "although it's more my judgment that the arrest of McCann has left them leaderless. I am not really looking for any more serious trouble. However, we'll be ready for it, if it comes."

CHAPTER XX

A GLIMPSE OF A WOMAN'S HEART

THE afternoon brought me increased faith that the imprisonment of Fergus McCann had practically ended the rebellion of the men forward. No doubt the spirit of mutiny still lingered, but without his leadership this had ceased to be dangerous. Unbacked by the New Yorker's display of wealth, Liverpool Red and Jim White were suddenly shorn of power to control the crew.

Of course these two were not of the kind to yield without a struggle; there would inevitably be an effort of some sort made to discover McCann's exact whereabouts, and release him. But this could be easily guarded against. Even in the darkest night there was small chance of any member of the crew being able to slip aft along the main deck unseen, and I took precaution to close, and lock securely, the only passageway below which led forward. Whatever scheme the two ringleaders might evolve, I felt we were now in position to effectively block. Their only possible chance of success, of obtaining control of the ship, lay in the exercise of force. Undoubtedly there were men enough forward to overwhelm us by sheer force of numbers, if they became desperate enough to make the attempt. But I no longer felt fear of this; not only had the

impression been left upon me as I faced them that they had already lost the spirit of resistance, but there was no gathering in groups forward, no whispered conferences, no indication of any kind to lead me to suspect they were planning action. White had gone below with his watch, while Liverpool was serving his trick at the wheel. Not so much as a word had been exchanged between the two since I had dismissed the crew. Probably their questionings had been prompted merely by curiosity, and not because of any purpose already fixed in their minds.

Nor did anything occur during the remainder of the day to lead me to revise this conclusion. The weather held fair, and the men worked cheerfully. Now that the liquor was out of them they proved themselves a fairly efficient crew, obeying the orders of the mates smartly. No occasion arose for me to interfere, and even Leayord expressed approval and surprise. I made a brief tour of the decks, noting that things were shipshape and in order in spite of the remnants of wreck forward, and then visited the engine room below, interviewing Masters, and giving him personal instructions relative to the duties of the coming night. All was quiet in his department, and the stokers were attending to their work. Apparently the crisis had been passed, and the only problem remaining to confront us was that of navigation. With my mind at rest on this point, I passed the hours of the afternoon largely in my own stateroom, sleeping for an hour or more in preparation for the night's watch on deck, and later carefully

figuring out in detail the exact course I should attempt to follow during the period of darkness.

Before the call to supper came, I called on Bascom to explain to him the situation, but found the man stupefied by some drug, taken perhaps to alleviate pain, and scarcely capable of comprehending my meaning. Satisfied that I could gain no assistance from him, I left the man lying helplessly in his bunk, and returned to the main cabin. Vera did not appear until after Leayord and I were seated at table, yet she had been on deck during the afternoon, and had much to say relative to the beauty of the ocean scene through which we sailed.

It was a pleasant hour we passed at the table, Leayord relieving Olson, but the girl and I lingering in rather idle conversation. She had learned, through the medium of Dade I presume, something of Bascom's present condition, and I felt obliged to answer her questions frankly, although I excused the man as much as possible, and led the talk into happier channels. However, she told us more of his history and family, relating in some detail her former acquaintance. The conversation drifted idly, and, when assured that Dade was safely beyond earshot, we spoke briefly of our plans, and outlined our future. Even Leayord had lost his suspicion of the men forward, and expressed his belief that our voyage would be without further serious internal trouble. I gave him instructions to change the vessel's course, and order an increase of speed when he returned to take charge of the deck, and a few moments

later noted with satisfaction that the tell-tale compass overhead indicated that we were headed straight into the north, and could feel the throbbing of the engines, and straining of the hull as we raced forward.

In spite of the pleasant day, and that the sun was still visible in the western sky, the air on deck was chill, and I returned below for a heavier coat, and also brought back with me a cloak belonging to the late commander with which to protect Miss Carrington. She laughed gaily as I wrapt it about her shoulders, for it was an old fashioned garment, evidently picked up in some foreign port, and retained as a curiosity, but its warmth was welcome. The evening was a beautiful one, the sky clear, the sea calm, except for the long ocean swell. But for a faint trail of smoke far to the westward, barely visible as the sun sank below the horizon, no evidence was discernible of any other vessel in the wide circle. I hailed the lookout in the maintop, but the wisp of smoke was too far away for his eyes to determine the course of the distant steamer, although as he swept his glasses a bit farther northward, they became fixed and motionless. As I stared up at him, his voice reported:

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?"

"About three points off the port bow, sir — a schooner's topsail."

"Very well, keep her in sight — a fishing vessel likely."

Leayord leaned over the poop rail.

"Shall I change the course, sir? She might prove something we wouldn't care to meet."

"Certainly not; we'll not attempt to dodge every fishing smack, and if that steamer is heading this way, we will be miles to the north before she reaches these waters. What is our rate now?"

"About seventeen knots, sir."

"Masters is getting the best he can out of the engines, I presume?"

"The old hooker has never done much better to my knowledge, sir. She never was no grayhound, but maybe, with the wind from that quarter, the sails might be trimmed to help a little."

"The experiment is worth trying, Mr. Leayord. Send Olson forward."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Both watches were on deck, clustered in a restless bunch before the forecastle, or overhanging the rail, evidently deeply interested in observing our efforts to get all possible speed out of the *Indian Chief*. The fading light gave me glimpse of their faces, and I noticed that both Liverpool and White were circulating freely from group to group. However, the men responded readily enough to Olson's orders, and sang cheerily as they tailed onto the ropes, Liverpool himself leading the way up the ratlines and out upon the main-yard as they sheeted home. The job was rather smartly done, and the canvas bellied out so stiffly that I suspected there was more wind aloft than was felt on deck. Olson remained forward, and we could hear his voice

assigning the men to various tasks as they returned to the deck.

"Is that all, sir?" asked Leayord from above.

"All at present; very smartly done at that; not a bad crew now they're sober."

"There are sailormen among 'em, sir. Shall I send the port watch below?"

"Not yet; Mr. Olson seems to be finding work for all hands, and they are better off kept busy. Perhaps the ship would ride easier, Mr. Leayord, if you let her head off a point — there is some danger of straining the steering gear."

"Aye, aye, sir — let her off a point, Carlson; easy now."

The stars began to pop out in the arch of sky above, silvering the waters, and we could no longer perceive what was taking place forward. The night shades settled about us, and the staunch *Indian Chief* drove her sharp bows through the black waste of sea in a race to cross the zone of danger before the coming of another dawn. Apparently everything was in our favor, and I stood there, leaning against the rail, chatting with Miss Vera, our conversation drifting idly. Darkness shadowed us, with only a bit of deck revealed by the faint light streaming through the glass of the companion. The riding lamps were not lit, as I preferred to take chances, assured that we were alone in that expanse of ocean. Things grew quiet forward, and Olson returned aft, pausing a moment to report to me, before clambering up the ladder to rejoin Leayord.

It must have been after nine when the girl left, complaining of being chilled even in the protection of the great cloak. I crossed the deck with her to the head of the stairs, and our hands clasped as we lingered there a moment, the dim light revealing her face uplifted toward mine.

"You are not going below, then, Mr. Hollis?" she questioned. "Surely all goes well?"

"So remarkably well," I admitted, "as to rather puzzle me. No, I shall remain on deck until morning; not that I really anticipate trouble, but the entire responsibility rests with me."

"You do not feel that your officers are efficient?"

"Only within their limits of knowledge. I like the men, and trust them, but at that they are only promoted from before the mast in an emergency. Neither possess any real knowledge of seamanship. You can go to your berth, and go to sleep, Miss Vera, assured that the ship will be in safe hands."

"I know it will, if you remain on deck," she answered earnestly. "I — I have learned to trust you."

"In seamanship?" I asked banteringly. "Why my ability in that line has scarcely been tested as yet."

"I do not mean seamanship — altogether. Yet I have had experience enough at sea to recognize a sailor. But it is in everything I trust you, Mr. Hollis. Really I — I think I have felt that way from the first."

"On the *Esmeralda*?"

"Yes even then. That was only a lark, a joke, and I had to keep hidden until the right moment. I did not

avoid you from any lack of faith in your discretion — but to remove you from temptation."

"Very nicely put; yet the real temptation was not to reveal your presence on board."

"You confessed you questioned my father."

"True, yet in a most indirect manner. My sole object was to keep your discovery to myself."

"Isn't that foolish! I have heard of you before, Mr. Hollis, but never as a lady's man."

"Yet surely I am not so old as to be exempt. No doubt my gray hairs —"

"Oh, have you any?"

"You pretend not to notice, but I am quite well aware of their existence myself. Probably deep down in your consciousness I am considered almost an antidiluvian."

"Why? Am I such a child?"

"The point of view, you know. You are young enough so that fifteen years must seem to you an age."

"Are you fifteen years older than I?"

"I suspect as much, and the thought of what that must mean to you is — well, almost embarrassing."

She laughed, withdrawing her hand from mine, and resting it on the stair rail.

"Why really I never once thought of that. Do you know I have not associated very much with those of my own age, so, perhaps, I fail to realize that a few years constitute a barrier. You — you have been so nice to me, Mr. Hollis, I have never noticed a single gray hair."

"Nevertheless they are there to be seen."

"I do not care, sir! If you were as gray as my father you would be just the same man you are to me." She hesitated, as though suddenly realizing that she was speaking very freely. "Perhaps I venture too far, but we did not meet in a drawing-room; there are no strict social rules out here to prevent my speaking the truth. You have served me, Mr. Hollis; you are serving me now, and I am grateful. I do not want you to think of me as a silly girl; I am a woman, and I feel and think as a woman."

"Did I appear to imply otherwise?"

"I thought, perhaps, you did. It may have been all imagination, but it has seemed to me that your whole manner has changed since you learned that I was Vera Carrington. When you considered me a mere nameless waif, a stowaway on the yacht, you were a thoroughly good fellow. We talked then with no constraint between us; we were just ourselves. Why should there be a difference?"

"You are Miss Carrington."

"Well, what of it!" indignantly. "Is that going to rob me all my life of my freedom to be a real woman? Believe me, I get enough of that sort of thing ashore. What good are my father's millions out here? or my social position in New York? You did not save me from the sinking *Esmeralda* because I was Gerald Carrington's daughter."

"I do not mean to displease you," I said earnestly. "Surely you cannot consider me a snob, or any mere worshipper of wealth?"

"No, I do not. You err the other way. You are so afraid that I might imagine you were interested in me because of these things, that you fail to be natural. You liked me on the *Esmeralda*, and when we were adrift in the boat?"

"I certainly did."

"You were not afraid to show it, or ashamed to let me realize. Now you are. Yet, Mr. Hollis, I am exactly the same woman. I am alone on this ship, dependent entirely upon your courtesy. The circumstances do not justify any misunderstanding between us; certainly no silly barriers of social rank, or wealth. I want the old friendship of the open boat, when I was merely Miss Vera to you — a waif of the sea. I — I cannot explain what I mean, but — but this sort of thing maddens me."

I endeavored to answer, to stop her, but, before I could do either, she had flung open the companion door and ran down the stairs. The next moment, without even glancing about, the girl vanished within her stateroom.

I stared down into the dimly lighted, deserted cabin, startled by her impetuous words, her sudden disappearance. I had not previously realized that my actions toward her had so noticeably changed. I wanted to tell her so, and even took a step downward with the purpose of rapping at her closed door, yet conquered the inclination, and returned to the open deck. I could serve her best there; and tomorrow — tomorrow she should be made to know the depth of my interest. Never until

then, as I stood there alone, gazing out across the rail over the black sea, the memory of her face before me, did I grasp the influence she had upon me. Into the very depths of my being her words cut, and brought pain and joy.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE HANDS OF THE CREW

THE hours of the night gave me ample opportunity for thought, and careful consideration. The wind held steady, and while the sea roughened somewhat this slight change was not sufficient to diminish our progress, or cause any swerving from the course set. All remained quiet forward, the watch on deck finding little to do other than their routine duties, and no member of the crew had any occasion to come aft, except those detailed to the wheel. There seemed no reason why I should remain on deck, as Leayord and Olson proved themselves thoroughly competent in handling the vessel, yet the responsibility rested upon me, and the importance of the night's run prevented my having any wish to retire below. However, I found no occasion to interfere with the operation of the ship, and remained mostly on the main deck, where my watchfulness assured me there was no communication passed between forecastle and cabin.

Only twice during the night did we have evidence that we were traversing the steamer lane. Once a light shot out over our starboard quarter, but so far away as to give us no uneasiness. Again and again I watched it flash along the sky, possibly the reflection of some

distant searchlight on a man-of-war, but, at last, even this vanished, as we swept steadily forward into the north. Some considerable time after midnight the lights of a steamer eastbound appeared off our port bow, and we hushed our engines, barely holding steerage-way, until the great liner passed us at full speed, her ports darkened, appearing the merest gray shadow as she swept between us and the dim line of horizon. The officer on her bridge may have had a phantom glimpse of our outlines, for her siren suddenly shrieked a wild challenge across the black water. But there was no slackening of speed, and, within a few moments, the last glimmer of light disappeared, and we had resumed our course, with engines at full speed. Olson, on watch, leaned over the rail, and spoke to me on the main deck below.

"A Cunard liner, sir."

"That would be my guess, Mr. Olson; which proves that we are on the northern edge of the steamer lane. They had glimpse of us."

"I doubt if they were quite sure, sir. A lookout saw our shadow, but they took no chances. They'll argue about it all day tomorrow on those decks."

"Ay, and no doubt report a narrow escape from a German raider, in the log. Perhaps they are sending the news wireless now."

"It wouldn't have to travel far, sir. There's a warship somewhere out yonder — did you see the searchlight an hour ago?"

"Yes; but we ought to have the fellow hull down

before daylight; we must be doing eighteen or nineteen knots now."

"All o' that, sir; an' if you notice it's mistin' up a bit."

This was true enough, as I verified by a trip to the port rail, and the fog grew steadily more dense, until at dawn, we were steaming recklessly through a thick cloud of vapor, barely able to observe the surface of the sea, dull, sodden gray, a few yards in advance of our bow. The dense, watery folds swept along our sides, and the rigging dripped moisture onto the glistening deck planks. It was a gloomy, dreary morning enough, and, even as the light of early dawn strengthened, I could scarcely distinguish a thing forward of the main mast. However, there was no slowing up of speed, or sounding of siren. Convinced that we were now safely to the north of the usual course of ships, I preferred to take the chance of possible collision. The remembrance of that warship to the southwest, and of the wireless message which might have been sent out from the suspicious Cunarder, urged me to accept the unknown danger lurking amid the gloom ahead, rather than chance the more certain peril hovering astern. Silently, without a light glimmering, at the extreme of our speed limit, the *Indian Chief* plunged headlong through the gray, butting the mist aside. Occasionally Leayord, on watch, hailed the lookout forward, and the response came echoing back, a mere thread of sound. But otherwise there was nothing to hear, or see. Even the sails were obscured, the lower yards a

mere shadow, wreathed about by gray mist, while the boats hanging in the davits appeared shapeless and grotesque.

My eyes were heavy from lack of sleep, and long staring out through the black night; my senses dulled by hours of inaction, during which nothing unusual had occurred to arouse me to a realization of impending danger. I no longer even suspicioned trouble, or any active hostility forward. If mutiny was being considered some symptoms surely would be apparent before now; an effort would have been made to communicate with McCann at least, and yet I was assured that no such attempt had been made. No one could have crossed that open space of deck unseen, either from forecastle or cabin, and the light burning in the latter enabled me to see every foot of its interior. With the dawn the density of fog enwrapping us seemed to increase, and completely blot out every glimpse of sea and sky. Even Leayord leaning over the rail just above me, could scarcely be distinguished as a man, and evidently his eyes could not make me out at all, for he hailed doubtfully:

"Are you still on deck, Mr. Hollis?"

"Yes," I answered, staring up at his shadow. "A bad fog."

"It is, sir. Would we better reduce speed? It's a blind gamble what may be ahead of us."

"No, not yet; I am counting on open water, and would rather chance striking a stray, than risk being overhauled by a British cruiser. The sun will split

this mist before noon, and meanwhile we must make all the northing possible. There is no storm brewing?"

"I think not, sir; the glass registered fair when I came on watch."

"I know; I looked at it myself an hour ago. We'll hold on then just as we are for the present. If my figures are right there ought not to be a ship yonder for five hundred miles."

"There's likely to be floating ice, sir."

"Scarcely so far down at this time of year, Mr. Leayord, and the drift would be nearer the Newfoundland Coast. We are well to the east of that danger. I'll go forward, and have word with the lookout."

I heard his "aye, aye, sir," as I crossed to the port rail. The vessel plunged a little in the roll of the waves, making a handhold safer when one could scarcely see a yard ahead, and the deck underfoot was slippery with moisture. I had reached a point nearly opposite the broken stump of the fore-mast, when I was suddenly confronted by two blurred figures emerging noiselessly from the deeper shadow cast by a quarter boat swinging in davits. The fellows must have known who I was, and the path of my approach; no doubt had been close enough aft to overhear my conversation with Leayord. At least they were on me almost before I truly realized their near presence — the one gripping the arm I flung up in startled defense; the other driving his fist straight into my face, a sledge hammer blow which sent me crashing back full length on the deck. Stunned, dazed as I was by this vicious attack, I made

an instant's struggle, but was quickly crushed back, a merciless hand gripping my throat. Almost at the same moment the revolver was removed from my pocket, the cold muzzle thrust against my cheek.

"Lie still, damn you," muttered a tense voice, and I knew the speaker for Jim White, "or I'll blow the whole top o' yer head off."

I retained sense enough to obey, White's knee pinning me to the deck, but some sound of my fall must have carried aft, for Leayord sung out through the fog:

"Forward there! What's all that racket about?"

White's fingers choked me into helpless silence, his knee crunching hard into my breast. It was Liverpool Red who answered sullenly:

"I knocked over a capstan bar, sir; never saw it in the bloomin' fog."

Leayord growled something, the words failing to carry to us against the wind, but a moment later, satisfied that no further investigation was to be made, Liverpool thrust White aside, and lifted me to my feet, his eyes glaring threat into mine.

"One whimper from you, an' yer overboard," he muttered hoarsely. "Take it from me we know what we're about. Come on now, an' don't attempt nuthin'. There's nobody forard here ter give yer a hand. Take him by the collar, Jim."

With White's hand gripping me, and my own revolver at my head, any attempt to break away would have been simply suicide. The thick fog hid the scene from

those on watch aft, and that the two men were reckless and desperate, their plans well laid, was evident. The gray light revealed their faces, and there was no mercy in the scowling eyes.

"Forward yer go, sir!" growled White, his fingers twisted in the jacket collar. "It's damn little more yer'l hav' ter say aboard this hooker."

"What do you propose doing? This is mutiny, men."

"To hell with the mutiny. It's war, an' we're Englishmen; this ship's loaded with war stuffs, bound fer Germany. That sort o' talk means nuthin'—so come on, and stow the gaff."

They forced me around the bulk of the windlass to the head of the forecastle steps, slid back the door in its grooves, and thrust me staggering down into the murky depths below. A slush light, swinging to a blackened beam in the deck above, cast a ghastly yellowish glare over the interior, revealing to me at least two-thirds of the crew, clustered about, evidently awaiting some such event. Hairy faces peered out from bunks, and men were sprawled about on boxes and the deck. The place was damp and smelly, the odor of oil mingling with bilge water, and sodden clothing swinging to wooden hooks on the side walls. For an instant the dirt and filth, combined with sharp swaying of the vessel under foot, almost sickened me, and I grasped the upright of a berth to keep erect, my eyes seeking to distinguish the faces, rendered scarcely visible by the miserable light. White held to my collar, but Liverpool

closed the entrance, shutting out even that faint breath of pure air, before speaking a word.

"Well, we've got the main guy, lads, an' no shindy," he said cheerfully, "an' a gun came with him. Now a few o' us will see if we can persuade the furst mate into taking a trip forward."

"Where's Billy Olson?" asked a voice.

"Oh, he's asleep below; there's plenty o' time to attend to him, an' we'll let the engine-room gang alone till we get control o' the deck. Simms, you an' Harris better come along with Jim an' me on this job. Leayord is a husky buck, an' we might not get him foul like we caught Hollis here. We don't want to hurt nobody unless we have to. Where's the nigger, Watson?"

"Right hyar, sar."

"Come on then; it's your trick at the wheel in five minutes; the rest o' you fellers know yer business."

The five men slipped out cautiously, sliding the door shut behind them, and I stared about into the faces of those left with me, still dazed by the rough handling to which I had been subjected, yet fully aroused to the fact that the attack on me had come from no sudden impulse, but was the first step in a carefully formed plan to gain possession of the ship. Whatever might be the secret purpose of those leading the revolt, their first intention was to overpower the officers, and attain control. My duty was to warn the men aft of the approaching danger. How should I act? What possible course could I pursue to win my liberty? In a vague way I knew most of the faces of those grouped about

me, but could recall only a few names. They were a rough lot, typical foremast hands, many of pronounced foreign appearance, yet there was nothing especially vicious about them. Ordinarily they would obey orders without a complaint, but now they were evidently under full control of their leaders; yet the expression of their faces bespoke curiosity rather than hatred. Determined to test them I straightened up, and placed a foot on the lower step.

"None o' that now?" a voice growled as a hand gripped my arm. "Turn him around, Bill, so he won't be tempted none to make a fool o' himself. Now, Mister, you don't want ter git hurt none, do yer?"

I faced the speaker, a big two-fisted giant with a red face, and a slow drawl in his voice.

"You mean to hold me here?"

"Sure; we've gone too far on this job now fer to back down. The lads are off ter bag the furst mate. Thar'd be a hell ov' a toime if we turned you loose."

"You're an Irishman?"

"'Twould be hard for a Dugan to deny that, sor."

"Well, Dugan, look here — you and your mates. You are sailormen, and know the rules of the sea. This is mutiny, and a mighty serious affair to be caught in, lads."

"We're not lookin' at it that way, Mister Hollis. We shipped fer a peaceful voyage, not to run no cargo o' contraband fer the Dutch. This yere *Indian Chief* is chock full o' munitions o' war — ain't that the truth, sor?"

"Yes," I admitted, "but shipped before war was declared. The sick man back there in the cabin has his whole fortune in this venture."

"To hell wid him, an' his fortune. The point is we're not Dutchmen, an' in wartimes it's no mutiny fer a crew to capture an inimy's ship."

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind who told us; it's the truth, ain't it?"

"Under some circumstances it might be," I said, casting my eyes about the ring of faces. "But the present conditions do not justify any such action. Now look here, Dugan; you fellows are in a mighty bad boat in this matter. You're merchant seamen; you've signed on, for a peaceful voyage, and it is no business of yours what's below hatches. That's for the warships to find out. The *Indian Chief* is under American register. She's a neutral boat, and your act is mutiny on the high seas. You know what that will mean to you, and your mates, don't you, if you're ever caught?"

"Who says that?"

"I do; and I know more of sea law than any of those fools who are steering you into this trouble. You kill a man on board here, and it is murder, and the whole bunch of you can be made to swing for it. Men have got life for less than you have done now. But I'll give you a chance."

"What chance, sor?"

"To stand by the ship. Set me free now, and back up the officers in maintaining discipline aboard, and not one of your names goes into the log."

"An' sail the bloomin' hooker to Hamburg?"

"Of course; that's the port you signed on for."

There was an uneasy shuffling of feet, and a muttering of voices. The light was too poor to enable me to decipher the expressions on the faces of the men, yet I felt that my words were wasted. Dugan, however, voiced the prevailing sentiment.

"Not a damned one ov' us is fer making that voyage," he said, grimly. "So stow yer tongue, mate." He winked at me facetiously, then glanced about at the others. "There's bigger wages comin' to us now than ever we signed on for."

CHAPTER XXII

HELD A PRISONER

THESE words, and the laughter with which they were greeted, made clear to my mind the whole truth of the uprising. It was not so much the destination of the ship, or the nature of our cargo, which accounted for the widespread spirit of mutiny aboard, as it was the McCann money. These other things had been used to influence the men, to convince them that they had a right to seize the vessel, and refuse to continue the voyage, but it was the glitter of the McCann gold which had won converts to this theory.

Liverpool and White were playing for high stakes, no doubt with a fixed sum offered for their services; perhaps had already been handed enough to scatter among the crew to enflame their passions. That would be easy, as no large sum would be necessary to induce them to repudiate a voyage already distasteful to the most of them. The sight of a little real money, coupled with the promise of more, would be sufficient to turn the trick. One thing was certain — no argument of mine, no threat of punishment, would have any present effect on the fellows. While there might be among them some who would listen to reason, this big Irish brute of a Dugan had control, and he could only be overcome by physical force.

There flashed through my mind a vision of what was already occurring on deck — the five men creeping silently aft through the fog until they attained the nearest spot possible without being observed by Leayord. Of the negro climbing the side-ladder, ostensibly to take his trick at the wheel, the first mate never suspecting any other purpose in his approach. No doubt the other wheelsman was in the plot, and stood ready to give a hand, and it was quite likely Watson would have my revolver hidden in his shirt. At the first sign of action the four men below would swarm up the ladder, and Leayord, taken completely by surprise, a gun at his head, would be in their power before he could strike a blow, or sound an alarm.

The very thought maddened me, drove me to desperation. We had been outwitted, completely deceived. The one, and only hope, lay in my escape; in my raising an alarm in sufficient time to warn Leayord of danger. He was a fighting man, and armed; one cry would put him on his guard, and his position on the poop would enable him to put up a strong defense. These thoughts flashed through my mind as I stood there, staring into Dugan's face. I dared not glance about, or seem to harbor any plan of escape, yet I knew that all was clear between me and the three steps leading to the deck, and that the sliding door was not hooked. The fellows were gathered closely about us in a half circle, Dugan alone being within reach of my arm. The only weapon I saw was a sea boot beside a chest to the right. The fellow must have felt some vague glimmer of my pur-

pose, for he gripped my shoulder, his iron fingers pinching the flesh.

"None o' that now," hoarsely. "You can't fight the whole —"

I struck him with all the force I could throw into the swift blow, and he went staggering back into the ring of men, his hands clawing at the air. But for their bodies the fellow would have measured his length on the deck. The force of his fall, the unexpected suddenness of it, for the instant stunned the others, and gained me opportunity. With one leap I had the heavy boot in my hand, and swung it crashing against the face of the fellow between me and the lower step. He went over like a stricken bullock. A hand gripped for me, but missed its hold; there was a roar of anger, a rush of bodies, and above all other sounds Dugan's voice howling madly:

"Stop him, yer tarriers! Crack him on ther head."

I stumbled over the body on the lower step, yet had reached the door, before the first man gripped my leg. I broke loose from his fingers, yet the instant of delay blocked escape. They were on me, their faces barely visible in the dim light, and I fronted them, fighting for life, striking fiercely with the great sea boot, its ironshod heel a terrible weapon. Twice men fell, but there were too many of them, nor could I protect my rear. They swarmed to either side, and clambered up behind me; the low beams of the upper deck permitting no swing to my arms; one fellow gripped my feet, and another leaped at my throat. I was tripped, and flung headlong, the

full weight of a man's body crashing down on top of me. Then came oblivion.

How long I remained unconscious I never knew, but it must have been some hours, for when I struggled back to a vague sense of life once more I was alone, lying on a mattress in a bunk. It was with a decided effort of will that I succeeded in opening my eyes, although I had been conscious for some time of the steady pulsations of the engines, and the rising and falling of the vessel, as though we were combatting a heavy sea. My head throbbed with pain, and I managed to lift one hand, assuring myself that my hair was matted with blood. I felt drowsy, dazed, scarcely interested; nor could I for the moment recall exactly what had occurred. Where was I? Had I met with some accident? It was only gradually that the vision began to reflect upon my mind — the attack on deck; the struggle in the forecastle; and then Vera Carrington. It was her face, her memory which aroused life, and gave me back the strength to struggle. The fate of the ship was of small importance to me, but the girl left alone and helpless among these ruffians, was a thought so filled with horror as to draw me back from the very gates of death. What had happened? Was the *Indian Chief* already in the control of the mutineers? How long had I been lying here unconscious? and where were we in the great solitude of ocean?

I forced my eyes open, finding at first the light blinding, and for an instant stared up through a red mist. Gradually normal sight came back, and I realized that

I rested in a bunk, gazing upward at the white-painted bottom of another. There was a splash of sunshine on the side wall, and I slowly turned my head toward the open port through which it streamed. Then I knew where I was lying — in the captain's stateroom. Why had I been brought there? What object could those villains have for giving me these quarters if they were really in control of the ship? Perhaps they were not; perhaps Leayord and Olson had been warned of danger in time to overcome them, and still retained command. That would account for my presence — but, if this was true, why was I left alone, uncared for? I could not reconcile myself to the thought that the girl would fail to be beside me if she was free. I had served her, and she was not the kind to desert a friend. And she was my friend; if nothing more I could at least claim, and rely upon her friendship.

Then what? I must be a prisoner, helpless, left alone to recover, or die, however the affair terminated. No, hardly that. No doubt the fellows knew that my wounds were not mortal; that I had received merely bodily blows and would return to consciousness without aid. But why had they brought me here? Gradually the conception of their purpose dawned — a navigator; the need of a navigator. Without me they were helpless; without my knowledge and skill not one on board could tell where they were, or how to shape the course of the vessel. I was a necessity to them; in a way I held the villains still in my power; they dare not let me die — not yet! I cannot explain the new life this thought brought to me.

I seemed to feel the strength of it injected into my veins, and I rose up on one elbow, and then, encouraged by this effort, swung my feet over the edge of the bunk, and rested them on the deck. The hands of my watch told me it was after eleven, and, through the port hole, I could see the great green surges, their crests tipped with white spray glistening in the sun. The early fog had vanished, and the sky was deep blue. Nothing in the stateroom appeared disturbed, but occasionally I could hear the crunch of a heavy foot overhead on the deck. I got to my feet, clinging to the berth, and swaying weakly at first, but gaining strength with every movement. The chart still lay on the desk, our course pricked on it up until noon of the day before, and the telltale compass told me the ship's bow was still pointed northward. I clawed my way across to the door, and tugged at the latch. It was locked.

This discovery vanished the least doubt. The men had won, and were in full possession. Whatever had been the fate of the others, of Leayord, Olson, Masters, Bascom, or any remaining loyal; whether they were dead or alive, they had been rendered helpless. Fergus McCann was in control by virtue of his money, and his chosen lieutenants were Liverpool Red and Jim White. What their object might prove to be remained to be learned — but they must seek some obscure port, or some safe spot for shipwreck, sacrificing everything else to their own safety — and, to accomplish this they must use me. Lord! I gripped that idea strongly enough, my brain clearing as I realized the important part I must

still assume in this odd sea tragedy. Perhaps I could not save the *Indian Chief*, but there was hope yet that I might be instrumental in preserving the lives of those whom my carelessness had imperiled. It would have to be wit I must rely upon — not weapons, or physical strength. I must meet these scheming villains with a clear head, and a carefully thought out plan.

There was water in the chocks of the iron wash stand, and I bathed my face, scrubbing as best I could the congealed blood from my hair. The wound on my head had bled freely, but was not serious, and the application of cold water lessened the pain, and helped to restore my faculties. A fine breeze swept in through the open port, and I sat down on a stool to gather together in my mind every detail which might prove of future value. I was still sitting there, but by then alert and ready, when a key turned in the lock, and the door was cautiously opened. McCann's face appeared in the opening, but his eyes were upon the bunk, and he failed to observe me where I sat beyond the desk. He took a step within, still staring at the rumpled blankets, and I had a glimpse of the enflamed countenance of Liverpool just beyond his shoulder.

"Hell's fire!" he ejaculated in startled voice. "The fellow's not here; he's got away!"

Red laughed, and pushed past, but still blocked the door with his great body.

"Got away! where could he have got to with the door locked? He's here all right."

I stood up and faced the two, the desk still between

us, but took the precaution to grip the stool by one leg.

"I am certainly present," I said coldly, "if your reference is to me; but I advise you both to keep your distance. I'll brain the first man who attempts to lay hand on me."

Red must have felt the challenge of my words, and I could tell he was in liquor by the vivid flame of his face. An oath broke from his lips.

"You tried that before; 'twill pay yer to be civil now."

"There were some of your ragamuffins who tasted the weight of my blow," I answered, "and I only hope it may be your turn next, you dirty dog of a mutineer."

"You'll git no chance to ever break yer stool on me, damn yer," he roared, jerking a revolver from his jacket. "Do yer see that? Well we've got the ship — "

McCann grasped his sleeve.

"Let up on that, Red," he said shortly, his voice having a tone of command in it, which surprised me. "We didn't come here to beat Hollis up, but to talk with him. This is my game."

The other did not resist, only to mutter behind his teeth. The gun still glistened in his hand, but I felt no fear of the fellow, and returned the stool to the deck.

"Tell me what you mean, and be brief about it."

McCann's eyes met mine, and I read in them uncertainty. He was not yet quite sure that he had my measure; how far I would resist, or what form my oppo-

sition would take. Perhaps for the moment money did not seem to him quite so important a weapon as he had found it elsewhere.

"I'm sorry the crew beat you up the way they did," he began apologetically. "They are a rather rough set—"

"Don't waste your time over that," I interrupted in disgust. "I can deal with an out-and-out fighter, and still respect him, but your kind only engenders disgust. There is no love lost between us, Fergus McCann, so state your purpose plainly, and without lying."

"By God! I will," he snapped, "and I'll put it straight enough this time to satisfy even you. The only reason I don't let Liverpool kill you is that you are more valuable to me alive. I've hated some in my time, but there never was a cur I despised worse than I do you."

"Thanks," I said quietly, "I am honored."

"And more than that, I pay my debts," his temper now entirely ruined by my pretence at indifference. "So I advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head—you're no longer in command of this ship."

I smiled at the two of them, calmly sitting down on the stool. I was not certain yet what hand I held, but determined to play the cards coolly.

"So you fellows are in control; and you come to me now with some sort of proposition. All right; what is it?"

"We need a navigator for a few days; one who will lay out the course we decide on."

"And I am the only one on board."

"You are by far the most competent," he confessed. "But you need not think from that we are helpless without you. I have no doubt I could figure the matter out fairly well if I had to, and I am perfectly aware that Miss Carrington possesses some knowledge of navigation. I imagine you might prefer doing this yourself rather than having her compelled to show her proficiency."

"Where is Miss Carrington?"

"In her own stateroom; I have not seen her since we took possession of the ship."

"And the others — Bascom, and the officers?"

"They're all right," broke in Liverpool, "except for some sore heads. We downed the owner and the second mate easy, but Leayord and the engineer made some trouble, and had to be soaked. We got 'em all quiet enough now, where they can't make any trouble."

"Where are they confined?"

He winked at me in a half-drunken leer.

"Which is none o' yer business — hey, Mr. McCann?"

CHAPTER XXIII

A COMPROMISE

THE impudent manner of the fellow served to fully awaken me to a realization of the helpless position I occupied. Only a consciousness of absolute power would give him liberty to speak like that; and it as instantly flashed over me that if I would save the ship, and give these others on board an opportunity at escape, the only possible chance lay in an apparent yielding. I held back the first hot retort on my lips, and forced a smile.

"I get the idea," I said, pretending a good nature I was far from feeling. "I am to merely work under orders. Well, I'd rather do that than let you wreck the ship, and perhaps drown the whole company. What is your object in this affair? You surely don't hope to dispose of this vessel and cargo?"

"No, I don't," and McCann took a step forward, his hand resting on the desk. "To be frank with you, Hollis, this affair has gone farther than I intended; it got the start of me while you held me prisoner aft here in the cabin. There's nothing for me to do now but work out of the fix as best I can."

"Mutiny then was not part of your original plan?"

"Not open mutiny — no. I'm no fool, and I know what that means. I started in to make the crew dis-

satisfied, so they would force you to put back to an American port. I offered them money, but with no intention of resorting to force. Then you locked me up, and this other thing happened. We've gone too far now to back out. The only thing left to consider is how we are going to get away safely."

"And leave the *Indian Chief* uninjured?"

"Certainly. If no real damage is done in dollars and cents there will be no object in pursuit, once we are safely away. Who is there to care?"

"Your point is not a bad one from your standpoint," I admitted. "But if ever I get ashore alive the port officers will compel me to make a report."

"We'll fix up the report on board," he said grimly. "It will be no trick to fake that."

"But suppose either Bascom or I refuse to sign such a document?"

"See here, Hollis, you may think this is a pretty little play, but it is not. We know what we're in for; we've talked it all over, and decided on the best thing to do. We don't care a damn for this ship, or its cargo, but we realize what mutiny means, and that some of us would likely face a life-term if we get caught. We don't mean to get caught. So it's up to you to decide whether the *Indian Chief* remains afloat, and no lives lost; or whether the old hooker is never heard of again."

"You'd scuttle the ship?"

"That's for you to decide; it's my advice to you not to take the chance."

I could scarcely believe he meant this; the proposition

was so absolutely heartless, so cold-blooded. I could hardly associate it even with Fergus McCann. The past week to be sure had pretty thoroughly revealed to me the despicable character of the fellow; I believed there was no crime too low for him to attempt if circumstances led him that way. He was vindictive, cowardly, and lawless. Yet I could not drive wholly from memory my earlier recollections of the man — a seemingly good-natured, story-telling guest on the pleasure yacht of a millionaire. The outward change was so great my mind could not fully grasp the facts. Surely he was not in reality the utter villain he now coolly professed himself. My eyes left his face, and sought Liverpool, who was leering at me in drunken gravity.

"Is this true, Red? Have you fellows held council?"

"Some ov us have," he said sullenly. "Jim, Dugan, Sims, and me, we talked it all over with Mister McCann here, an' agreed what wus best. That's why the two ov us come ter see you."

"Unless I consent to sign a report showing your desertion of the ship justified, you propose to sink the *Indian Chief?*"

"You, an' Bascom — both ov' yer."

"And if we do sign — what then?"

"You'll sail us within fifty miles ov' the nearest open port, and we'll take to the boats, and leave you to be picked up."

"You'd report our condition ashore?"

"Nothin' was said about that. Yer drift would be southard, an' would soon bring yer in the track o'

ships; besides there's enough left ter handle the sails ter give the hooker steerage way. We figured ye'd be safe unless there was a big storm."

It was certainly a cold-blooded proposition, but the fellow's tone was so matter-of-fact I no longer doubted this to be their final decision. McCann evidently suddenly aroused to the danger of his position engendered by the violence of the crew, had schemed this method of escape, and gained their consent. Liverpool and White would be ripe for anything they might hope to profit by, and the others would be afraid to oppose. Knowing how useless the effort probably was I played my last card.

"See here, Red," and I drew a paper from the drawer of the desk. "Do you fellows realize the value of this ship, and the cargo below hatches?"

"We don't give a damn."

"Well, you better, for it's a tidy little sum. Now see here — I'll pledge the crew fifty thousand dollars, to be divided as you choose, if you will dock the *Indian Chief* at Hamburg."

"Who'll pay it?"

"The owner, within ten days of landing."

"An' if we get snapped up by an English, or French cruiser on the way over, all we'd ever get would be a jail. That sorter plan don't make no hit with me, nor my mates. We've talked it all over."

McCann struck the desk with his fist, impatient at the discussion.

"Your price is too low, Hollis. This is no piker's

game. Red knows it is worth more than fifty thousand to me to get back to New York." He laughed sneeringly. "You might be able to do me up with your fists in an open boat, my man, but when it comes to a show down in hard cash you're licked off the boards every time. So now, will you help us quietly? or shall we have to make you?"

"What is it you desire of me?"

"That you work out an observation once a day, and set the ship's course as we direct; then tell us when a certain point has been reached."

"What point?"

"Fifty miles northeast of St. John's."

"And then what happens?"

"We will take to the boats, and leave you and your officers to do what you please with the ship."

"Are all the crew with you in this mutinous deal?"

The eyes of the two men met, and Liverpool blurted out.

"They'll all do what we say; there's none ov 'em yer kin count on fer ter fight on your side; but maybe there's a couple we won't hav' no use for when we take to the boats."

"Who are they?"

"Thar's no need o' my tellin' yer that."

"Well, even with those two this will only give us six able-bodied men; that is not enough with which to bring the *Indian Chief* into port."

"It will be all you'll have, anyhow," said McCann grimly. "And you are mighty lucky at that. The drift

will be southward, and will take you directly into the steamer lane. All you need do is keep steerage way, and wait until you are picked up. You don't imagine we want you sailing into the harbor at St. John's the same time we get there, do you? Come on now; stop this talk, and give us an answer."

For a long moment I stood motionless, staring out through the open port at the sun-lit waters. It seemed to me my best course was to at least pretend to yield to their wishes. Nothing certainly could be gained through refusal, for they possessed the power to compel obedience. To acquiesce would insure me a measure of freedom on board, an opportunity to learn the exact conditions, and might enable me to save the ship from destruction. The mutineers had already gone too far to withdraw; their position was sufficiently desperate to render them reckless as to other crimes. Probably there was no act they would hesitate to resort to now to insure their escape from the punishment already due under the law. Not even murder, the sinking of the vessel at sea, would be beyond them.

As to McCann, he had some object in all this far more important than appeared on the surface. He was never assuming this risk, or investing all this money in an illegal cause, without a more serious purpose than an idle desire to return to New York. He was taking a tremendous chance, driven by some impulse I could not comprehend. What was the secret — hate, revenge, greed, love? I would find out sometime; but now I could only grope in the dark, guessing at his motives. Yet I

knew this — his promises were lies. He would make use of me; he would induce me to pilot the ship to the spot he desired to attain on the broad bosom of ocean, and then — what? The man would never be fool enough to permit the *Indian Chief* to sail into any harbor to accuse him of such a crime. Back of all his words, his explanations, his apparent fairness, lurked treachery. I felt it, and knew it, and the very suspicion led me to reach swift decision. My eyes met his with a smile.

"I cannot conceive that I have much choice," I said quietly. "It is to either do this in freedom, or under compulsion. Naturally I prefer the former. This isn't my boat, you know, or my cargo. I merely agreed to navigate it as a kindness to Bascom, and in a spirit of adventure. My head is worth more to me than a few dollars, and there is no reason why I shouldn't figure out the position for you. Indeed, I must do it for the safety of the ship. It's nearly noon now."

"You mean you accept our offer?"

"Yes; I will figure out the proper course, and report to you when the vessel is at the place you designate. That is all that is asked of me. In return I have your pledge that the ship will be left in good condition, with all who are loyal safe on board?"

"Yes."

"There is one more condition, McCann."

"What?"

"That Miss Carrington be left absolutely unmolested by either you or your men, until the time comes for you to take to the boats."

"Hah! So that is really where the shoe pinches!"

"We will not quarrel about it — either say yes, or no."

"What do you mean by unmolested? Am I prohibited from speaking to the lady?"

"That is to be left to her choice, not yours. She is to retain the key to her stateroom; to eat alone if she prefers, and to see such associates aboard as she desires."

Liverpool laughed drunkenly.

"Ter hell with the difference," he said easily. "So far as I see that don't change things none. She's locked herself in anyhow, an' won't answer nobody. Yer might as well tell the skipper yes, Mister McCann, an' let him get on deck ter shoot the sun. We don't wanter lose a whole day just dickering down here."

McCann growled something which I took to be assent, and I was, myself, so anxious to ascertain our exact position, as to have no desire for further argument. The best course of action I could pursue for those left helpless aboard, was to accept whatever degree of freedom the mutineers offered me in return for the services I could render them. I could be of no possible value locked a prisoner in that stateroom; no protection to her. Indeed, if I refused to navigate the vessel, leaving the ship to drift blindly through these unknown waters, exposed constantly to peril, I would be guilty of a failure to do my duty almost as great as the crime of these others. On deck, knowing where we were and the direction in which we were heading, the opportunity might

arise for the accomplishment of much. I grasped the necessary instruments from the swinging shelf, and, with these in my hands, turned toward the door.

"Come on then," I said, ignoring the fact that I was any longer a prisoner. "Bring the chart one of you, and I'll point out where we are to you on deck."

"Just hold on a minute," and Liverpool, blocking the doorway, pushed me back with his huge hand. "We're the bosses, not you. Git it out o' yer head right now, Mister, that yer the captain of this ship *Indian Chief*. Damn yer! ye ain't nuthin'; an' if yer attempt to play us any dirty tricks, I'll smash yer the same as I would a fly. Ain't that right, Mister McCann?"

"Oh, Hollis understands, Red. He knows we've gone too far in this game to take any chances. Let him pass."

"Well," growled the giant, stepping aside, "I just wanted him ter know. I don't kill nobody in cold blood; but I'm goin' ter take keer of myself, an' my mates. Yer git me, skipper?"

"Yes, I get you," I answered a bit wearily. "So let it go at that, my man; I know the time to fight, and the time to keep quiet. Now let's go on deck."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE INTERRUPTION

EXCEPT for the absence of the regular officers from their stations I should not have known any especial change had taken place on board the ship. Outwardly everything appeared about as usual. There were no signs of disorder in the after-cabin, although several of the stateroom doors stood wide open, and Dade, who was polishing the stair-rail, turned and gazed at me curiously as I emerged behind Liverpool, with McCann trailing behind. The latter paused to insert the key into the lock of the door, and I indulged in one swift glance about the apartment.

"Bascom occupies his own stateroom?"

Liverpool nodded ungraciously enough.

"And Miss Carrington retains hers?"

"We are not here to be interviewed, Hollis," broke in McCann sharply. "Go along on deck, and keep your tongue to yourself."

Realizing that silence was my best weapon, I made no response, but climbed the stairs. It was a day of beauty, a soft southwest wind blowing, the sky a deep blue overhead, and the sea just rough enough to be full of charm, the wave crests tipped with sun, the hollows dark with shadows. I paused an instant, seamanlike, as my eyes swept the distant horizons, and then wandered aloft to

the furled topsails. It was, indeed, a fair sea picture, with the *Indian Chief* alone amid the whole expanse of ocean. Forward a few sailors loitered about the capstan, and there was a man in the maintop, but these were all that were visible, and they stared at us without movement. White leaned over the poop rail, looking down in silent curiosity — but nowhere was there any evidence of disorder, or relaxation of discipline. The decks were clean — had evidently been scrubbed that morning, and nowhere could I perceive any signs that the ship was in the hands of mutineers. Liverpool gripped my shoulder.

"Up the ladder with you," he ordered. "There's too little time left for gaping about here."

There were two men at the wheel, although one could have attended to the service, as the ship was at half-speed, and the sea far from heavy. I recognized both faces, but couldn't recall their names; the shorter fellow, deeply potted, exhibited a fresh scar where I had struck him with my boot heel the night before. He grinned good naturedly, and pointed to the bruised flesh, as I caught his eye. White was evidently the temporary officer, in charge, and the brutality of his face was clearly revealed in the bright light, as he leaned against the rail. However, I had scarcely time to more than glance about, as the sun was already at the zenith. The others stood around silent, watching as I figured out our position on the back of an old envelope. I took my time at it, not only from my own anxiety to be accurate, but also because of other thoughts in my mind, yet

the calculation was completed at last, and I lifted my eyes to McCann's gaze.

"Well?" he said.

I gave him the figures.

"You are sure this is correct?"

"As sure as I can be; the chronometer hasn't been corrected since the ship left Baltimore; except for possible variations on that account, the figures are right. Spread out the chart, and I'll show you where we are within ten miles. Here — that was our position at noon yesterday; since then our course has been about as follows — hand me the ruler and compasses, White. Yes, those are what I mean. Now lean down here where you can see for yourselves. We held nor', nor'east until sundown at quarter-speed; then straight north at from fifteen to eighteen knots as long as I was on deck. That should have put us along in here. What did you do after that?"

Liverpool stepped over to the binnacle, and peered into the hood.

"About a point west o' north, with the wind on our port quarter."

"At what speed?"

"Pretty steady, as we are now, isn't that it, White?"

"Yes; shut down maybe for an hour."

"When did you furl the sails?"

"After we started up the engines again; while we had all hands on deck."

"Well," I announced, after a moment of measuring, "that would tally pretty close with the figuring. Our

present position is just about here, where I put the red cross."

The three bent down and stared at the spot on the chart, McCann even getting to his knees on the deck, and the two wheelsmen craning forward to look over our heads. There was a moment of breathless silence, and then McCann took the compasses from my hand, and began to measure distances.

"Two hundred and ten miles to the northern extremity of Newfoundland — is that it?"

"A trifle more, I should say."

"This is St. John's here; what southing does that give?"

"Over two hundred."

"Do you know the harbor?"

"Only by description; I have never been there. This is the best season, of course, but even at that the coast is not considered very safe."

"Ice?"

"There might be some even this late, but the principal danger is from storms and fog. St. John's is quite a shipping point, however, and a naval base during the summer months."

"Even the Montreal steamers pass to the south of where we are?"

"They do not even sight Cape Race."

He studied the map a few moments longer, the three men talking earnestly while I left them, and walked over to the starboard rail. It was of no particular interest to me where they decided to go — the one port meant

the same to me as another; I was only anxious to have the matter definitely settled, and learn my exact status on board. Finally McCann got up, rolling the chart in his hand.

"There is no use then," he called, "of our going further north?"

I turned and faced them.

"Not if your port is St. John's; the course would be sou', sou'west. Is there anything more wanted of me at present?"

McCann turned and spoke to the others, both answering him in low tones.

"No," he said, stiffly. "We will send for you, if you are needed again on deck."

"I am expected to keep below?"

"Below, and to your stateroom. If you attempt to converse with any of the crew you will be locked in."

I passed them without a word, and clambered down the ladder to the main deck, aware of the grinning faces of the men at the wheel. Humiliating as the situation was, this was no time for resistance, or the exhibiting of a spirit of revolt. White crossed over to the rail and watched until I vanished within the companion. I realized his presence without so much as glancing up.

To my surprise the cabin was vacant, with no preparations for dinner evident. Even the swinging table had not been lowered, although I could hear Dade rattling dishes in the steward's pantry. There came to me, as I paused at the foot of the stairs, a sudden eagerness to speak to Vera, to explain to her the situation,

and bring to her a word of comfort. There was no shadow on the skylight above; nothing to make me feel that my movements were being observed, and, as I glanced upward to gain this assurance, I noted the tell-tale compass, and marked that the ship was already swinging about on the new course. This change would rivet the attention of those on deck for a few moments, at least, and yield me opportunity. I crossed over hastily and rapped at her stateroom door. I felt sure there was a movement within, but no response. With lips close to the wood I spoke.

"Miss Vera."

"Who is it?"

"Hollis; may I have a word?"

The key turned, and she stood facing me, her eyes filled with startled welcome. An instant the girl gazed at me, as though distrusting her own sight; then suddenly extended both hands, with a stifled cry.

"Why — I thought; they told me — oh! I am so glad!"

"They told you what?"

"Why, nothing, direct. But there was fighting last night. I — I heard the struggle on deck, and then here in the cabin; and when I started to leave my room I encountered McCann, and some of the crew. They were dragging Leayord down the stairs, and his face was all blood."

"*You* were not injured?"

"No; the big man with the red hair threatened me, but McCann interfered, and thrust me back into the

stateroom. He told me to lock the door, and not to make any noise."

"Yes, but what was it you were told about me?"

"Nothing then; later, perhaps an hour or two, all was quiet below when someone tried my door. I asked who was there, and it was Fergus McCann who answered. I was afraid of him and would not open. I told him I was armed and would fire if he tried to enter. What I said made the man angry, but after a while he went away, yet first he said some things about you."

"No doubt, the cowardly cur — what were they?"

"You mustn't ask — only that if I expected your help, I'd wait a long while. I — I thought they had killed you."

"Well, they tried hard enough, but, as you see, I am very much alive still. They trapped me in the forecastle. Do you know what has become of the others?"

She shook her head.

"What I've told is all I know. Those villains have control of the ship?"

I related the story to her swiftly, concealing nothing. Hers was a nature to trust at such a time, and I marked her eyes darken, and her slight form straighten as I proceeded. Twice she questioned me, as though already some vague plan of action was forming itself in her mind. At the last she asked:

"That is all? You know no more?"

"No."

"Then the others must be alive, and on board. Surely you would have heard if any had been killed?"

"I believe so; they would not kill if possible to avoid it, as such a crime would render their own case more desperate. Then there was no need as the surprise of the attack was complete. No one had any chance to resist."

"What — what are you going to do?"

"Frankly, Miss Vera, I do not know," I confessed. "I have had no time to think, and my head still throbs so from blows that I hardly realize the situation. I cannot hope to fight these men alone, and there can be no immediate danger — they are sailing the ship toward St. John's; see the compass yonder; we head into the sou'west."

"You believe they will take to the boats, and leave us aboard?"

"That would be their only safe course. They would never dare sail the *Indian Chief* into that, or any other harbor. They must land as ship-wrecked seamen; tell their story, and then quickly disappear."

"I — I know that — but — but will they dare to leave us afloat? to be picked up by some vessel?"

I hesitated, but her eyes compelled an answer.

"I do not know," I said soberly. "It hardly seems possible they can contemplate such an act of villainy as the scuttling of the ship, and leaving us on board to drown like rats. That would be too horrid a crime for this age. White and Liverpool might be brutal enough, but surely not Fergus McCann."

"Why not Fergus McCann?"

"His education, his former life, the civilization in

which he has been reared; he has lived among gentlemen."

"Gentlemen!" she echoed the word in scorn. "His associates have been principally gamblers and rounders. He is notorious in New York, and his money alone gives him entrance to decent circles. He doesn't know what the word gentleman means. I fear him more than all the others — he has more to lose if this tale is ever told than these poor sailors he has duped. If there is treachery behind this, it will be the plan of Fergus McCann."

"You know him better than I."

"I know of him longer; I have heard more tales, yet surely you saw what he was in the boat?"

"A coward, a liar — vengeful, unforgiving — "

"Is any act of crime beyond a character like that?" she exclaimed, looking me straight in the eyes. "Will that kind of a man leave evidence behind him if he can avoid it? If he can induce those men with him to sink this ship there will be no evidence — they will never dare talk, for if they do they face a charge of murder."

"You believe then the intention is to scuttle the vessel?"

"Yes, I do."

"And leave us helpless on board?"

"Yes, Mr. Hollis."

I drew a deep breath, at this direct verification of my own secret suspicion.

"So do I," I returned in a whisper, "although I had no thought of telling you."

"You have some plan then? You have considered what to do?"

"No; hardly that. There will be two days, at least, before we shall be close enough to the coast for them to take to the boats. Much may happen within that time; we may be spoken by some other vessel, even overhauled by a warship, and manned by a prize crew."

"You hope for this?"

"St. John's is a naval base; the closer we approach the harbor the more apt we are to encounter a British cruiser. I shall give them a course as far south as I dare, but cannot venture to deviate much, for McCann knows enough navigation to check my figures."

Her fingers grasped my sleeve.

"But, Mr. Hollis, if all these hopes fail, and there should be no rescue, is there not something we can do? Must we remain here helpless, just waiting for death to come?"

I took the little hands in mine tenderly, and, with an effort, controlled my voice.

"Perhaps so, but we cannot be too cautious. Our only chance is to retain our freedom, and arouse no suspicion that we are plotting together. It is scarcely probable that we shall have another opportunity to be alone; but you will be less apt to be watched than I. Can you learn where the others are confined, and get the word to me?"

"Yes," she said. "I—I think I can."

"What is it you think you can do, Miss Carrington?" said a voice quietly.

CHAPTER XXV

THE INTERVENTION OF VERA

McCANN stood in the open passageway leading to the steward's pantry, less than fifteen feet distant, a satirical smile on his lips, as he observed our familiar position. How long he had been there, and what portion of our conversation he had overheard I had no means of knowing, and for the instant I stood speechless, my brain a blank. Not so with Vera. With a laugh, ringing out as naturally as though in full appreciation of some sudden gleam of humor, she withdrew her hands from mine, turned and faced him, executing a mocking curtsey.

"Hardly fair, Mr. McCann," she said, "to steal upon us like that."

"Perhaps not," he answered grimly, "but just now I am privileged to do as I please on board this ship. Answer my question — what is it you think you can do?"

The red blood flushed into the girl's cheeks, but I remained silent, unable to think of any explanation which would meet the requirements.

"Perhaps an answer will be embarrassing."

"Stop the play acting," he burst forth, advancing about the stair rail. "What were you talking about? I want a direct answer."

The girl's long lashes shaded her eyes, but there was not the slightest falter to her voice.

"Captain Hollis," she said softly, almost regretfully, "had asked me if — if I thought I could learn to — to like him, and I said I — I thought I could. That — that was all."

McCann stared at the innocent, downcast face as though he half believed the words her lips uttered were deliberate lies; then he laughed mirthlessly.

"I see," he said with sarcasm. "No misfortune along other lines is sufficient to interrupt Mr. Hollis' love-making. My congratulations, Captain, on even this measure of success."

The hot blood flushed my face, not so much at the words as the tone with which they were uttered. They conveyed to me a deliberate insult, tingling with a memory of the purpose he charged me with during our last interview. Then I could laugh at him, conscious that I held the hand of power, but now the situation was reversed, and, unfortunately, the girl, in her effort to hide our real plans, had chosen an explanation which left me helpless to defend myself. I could not deny her confession; I could say nothing which would relieve myself from the impression now firmly implanted in his mind that I was a mere adventurer, planning to get my fingers on the Carrington wealth. I read the truth instantly in McCann's face; he had not quite understood me before, but now he felt convinced that under all the veneer I was his kind; and he instantly felt that he knew how to deal with my case.

"Your congratulations are appreciated for what they are worth," I answered, unable to wholly restrain myself. "But we will let the discussion end here."

"Oh, will we? Well, perhaps you will recall that circumstances have changed since our last talk. I was the prisoner then, and when I ventured to tell you the truth to your face, when I charged you with the purpose of winning the affections of this young woman, hoping thus to reach her father's wealth, you locked me up. But you are no longer captain of this ship — I am; and I will say what I please on board. The first thing I propose doing is to tell Miss Carrington who and what you are."

Her eyes flashed over my face, then sought his.

"Do I understand," she asked clearly, "that I have been before a topic of conversation between you? What was the occasion?"

McCann laughed, not in the least embarrassed, and evidently convinced that his position was sufficiently strong to give him a clear advantage.

"Hollis' natural modesty prevents his answering, but as a disinterested party, I will take upon myself to explain. I realize, Miss Carrington, that you are somewhat prejudiced against me, and I regret very much having lost my self-control in the boat, and thus permitting you to believe me to possess a brutal nature. The truth is I comprehended from the first the real object of this fellow in seeking your friendship. I even compelled him to acknowledge that your father's money was the main attraction."

I stepped forward, unable longer to restrain the action.

"You dog of a liar," I said fiercely. "I know you are armed, but—"

"Wait, Captain Hollis," and her fingers caught my arm. "This matter involves me, and I wish to hear the facts. Go on, please."

McCann grinned into my face, but kept one hand behind him, gripping his revolver.

"There is not much to tell," he went on, almost jauntily. "I saw exactly how things were going before we left the boat. I knew Hollis' reputation ashore, and determined to warn you of his purpose, but had no opportunity. Besides I felt you had so poor an opinion of me that probably you would not listen."

"You were greatly mistaken, Mr. McCann," she said pleasantly. "I would have gladly received your advice. You were my father's friend."

I could read the man's surprise in his face. The graciousness of her words was a shock, yet his egotism made him instantly her victim.

"You mean you trusted me? That you would have listened?"

"Most assuredly. How could you think otherwise? I knew you were not yourself in the boat, and the treatment to which you were subjected was brutal. I owed my life to you equally with Captain Hollis, and am very grateful. I have never forgotten that you have been a guest in our home, a business associate of my father's. Why should I not have confidence in you?"

"You dog of a liar," I cried fiercely

I looked at her in amazement, but her eyes never met mine. What did this mean? Was the girl acting a part? was she endeavoring to deceive him, or was she speaking now in deadly earnest? Nothing in her manner, or in the tone of her voice, gave me a clue. She appeared earnest, frank, sincere, and I held silent, realizing that whatever her secret purpose might be, no words of mine would change it. As for McCann, the very expression of his face pictured his delight, his conviction of her sincerity. It was almost too good to be true, yet his was not a nature to doubt his own attractiveness.

"I — I — you surprise me," he stammered, absolutely forgetting my presence. "I — I assure you I was actuated by the highest motives in all my efforts. My — my duty was to you, and your father. The interest between you and Hollis then has not gone so far as to be beyond my power to remedy?"

She smiled.

"Oh, no; I assure you."

He turned, and faced me, the bully in him surging to the surface.

"I will converse with Miss Carrington alone. You were ordered to your stateroom before."

"I did not so understand. I was merely told to go below."

"Well, you understand now. Open the door; go in, and close it."

To resist would have been utter foolishness. I could see the gleam of the gun in his hand, and realized that

he only required an excuse to use it. More, there was nothing in the expression of the girl's face to inspire me to resistance. She did not even glance toward me, or exhibit the slightest interest. Yet never did I hate, despise the fellow more than at that instant. Every nerve in me throbbed with the desire to reach out and crush him with my hands. Aye, and I would have done it, risking his shot, staking all on my strength and quickness, had I not seen at that moment White appear at the head of the stairs, staring down at us, his hand still gripping the door of the companion. Even as he hesitated, Dade emerged from the steward's pantry laden with dishes. McCann saw them also, and his courage flared up.

"Don't forget, Hollis," and his voice had in it the old harshness, "that you are no longer captain of the *Indian Chief*. Return to your room."

With hands clinched in impotent rage, not even venturing a reply, I stepped backward. As I crossed the threshold McCann closed the door, and I heard the key turn in the lock. No other sound reached my ears except a smothered laugh, and the rattle of dishes as Dade deposited his load on the table. I waited a moment, bending close to the wood, in the hopes of overhearing some scrap of conversation, but the intervening door was sufficiently solid to shut out all semblance of sound. Trembling still with anger, and dazed by the strange action of the girl, I sank back upon the stool, realizing my utter helplessness. All she had done, and said, appeared so natural it never really occurred to me at

once that she might be acting a part, seeking in this way to gain McCann's confidence, in order to win from him the information we required. It was only as I sat there in silence, brooding over every detail, that this possible conception began to slowly dawn upon my mind. That she could trust the man in any way was practically impossible, for he had revealed to her his true character in so many ways the memory could not be blotted out. No, her graciousness must be assumed to cloak a purpose; her quick womanly wit had instantly grasped the only avenue of escape. Why, how swiftly that wit had worked in her rapid explanation of our overheard conversation. I could think of nothing to say; could call up, upon the spur of the moment, no combination of circumstances which would make the spoken words sound intelligible. But she had; she had instantly fitted the very phrase which sounded the most suspicious into a remark so extremely natural as to even convince McCann she spoke truly. Strange she should have thought of that; that she should have hit upon the very idea most apt to deceive him. I could hear her voice, soft, hesitating, repeating again the words: "Captain Hollis had asked me if — if I thought I could learn to like him; and I said I thought I could. That — that was all." It was an explanation no man would likely question; even in his suspicion and anger it carried conviction to McCann. And the words — embarrassing words they must have been — were spoken to save me; were uttered for my sake.

As the full knowledge of this truth grew apparent, I

was able to view all that had occurred later in a different light. She had simply accepted her one chance; had grasped with womanly intuition the single weapon left at her command. All at once, inspired by sudden confidence, she had determined to fight out the battle alone. Girl as she was in years, her experience in the world had been that of a woman, and she instinctively realized her power — the power of wealth, of beauty, and of youth. Possibly she was not wholly unaware that McCann exhibited already personal interest in her; if not she certainly felt confident that she could arouse such interest if she made the endeavor. My questioning, my doubt, turned to admiration. It had been beautifully done, so deftly accomplished as to deceive even me. Aye! and the method had succeeded with McCann. I recalled the expression of surprise, of gratification, of awakened pride on the man's face. He had no power of resistance left; he was already putty in her hands.

True, but would he remain so? The game she played was a dangerous one; if she ventured too far she would discover the brute lurking in him still. And he had the power, the physical power, to wreak vengeance once he suspicioned deceit. His money, his education, his force, made him supreme on board; neither Liverpool or White would venture to oppose any plan he might promulgate, and, with their backing, the mutinous crew would be found obedient enough. Indeed, they had gone so far already they must stick together now for mutual safety. And there was no one to help her if

she made a single false step — absolutely no one; she was a lamb among wolves. I paced the narrow space, forgetful of all else except this peril which imagination pictured, pausing to listen at the door, and glancing out the open port on the vista of sea and sky. God! how weak, how helpless I was — alone, a prisoner, with no weapon at hand; no knowledge even of where the others on whom I could depend were confined. If I could plan; if I could even hope to act; I was ready enough to perform a man's part; but even this was denied me. Those fellows would never release me again, not for a moment. I would be compelled to take observations, to calculate position, to trace our sailing course on the chart, but not for an instant would I be left again unguarded, either on deck, or in the cabin. McCann would see to that.

The afternoon passed, dragging its weary hours. Nothing happened to relieve the monotony and dread of solitude. No one approached the door of the stateroom, not even to offer me food, and my ears were able to distinguish no sound of movement in the main cabin. Occasionally footsteps passed along the deck overhead, and once or twice I heard the voice of Liverpool sing out some order to the men forward. The sun sank, its rays glinting across the waters, and telling me the ship held to its southwest course, but the ocean, so far as I could see, remained desolate, the horizon unbroken by a gleam of sail, or smudge of smoke. No echo of a cry reached me from any lookout aloft. The vessel proceeded quietly, no effort being made apparently to

achieve speed. I judged our rate would not exceed eight knots, and decided there was either a scarcity of men in the stokehole, or else they were conserving fuel to attain greater speed during the hours of darkness. The bright sunlight began to fade into a purple dusk.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FRENCH MAN-OF-WAR

NO food was brought me during the afternoon, nor had I eaten all day, yet my mental state was such I had no consciousness of hunger. The rattle of dishes was about the only sound reaching me from the cabin, making me aware of the passage of time. Thus I could determine when Dade set and cleared the table. The last meal of the day hung on until long after dark, and I had given up all thought of being remembered. The sea without was shrouded in blackness, except for the faint glimmer of starlight reflected along the crests of racing billows. Within, I had discovered no means of creating a light, although my eyes were sufficiently accustomed to the dimness to enable me to move about my narrow quarters safely enough. From the sound of his voice, which occasionally reached me through the open port, I was aware that Jim White had charge of the deck above, and the revolutions of the screw indicated a marked increase in speed, probably to twelve knots.

It must have been between eight and nine o'clock when the key turned in the lock of my door, and Liverpool looked in. The light from the swinging lamp in the main cabin flared into my eyes, blinding me, yet I recognized his face, and saw Dade close behind him,

bearing a tray. Neither man spoke, but Red, having assured himself of my presence, stood aside, and motioned the steward to enter. The latter deposited the laden tray on the desk, and backed out silently, every movement showing him thoroughly cowed by his guardian. Realizing that any word from me would only result in insult, I remained silent, and the two disappeared, closing and locking the door behind them. I confess I ate the food with relish, for it was well cooked, and served with some daintiness. After a second cup of coffee I felt much more like myself, rummaging through the captain's chest until I found some tobacco and a pipe, which I at once appropriated to my own use. No one returned for the emptied dishes, and I sat for a long while at the open port smoking, the blue spiral swept away by the rush of air and my eyes on the starlit waters.

My mind was busy enough, far too busy to permit of sleep, yet my thoughts brought me nowhere. The situation, from my point of view, was absolutely hopeless. No doubt I could break down the door, but this would only create an alarm, and I would emerge into the grip of a dozen men. Even if free there was no possibility of my winning back control of the ship alone and unaided. Every weapon on board was in possession of the mutineers, and they were taking no chances on having their plans overturned. The leaders, at least, realized the desperate situation in which they had placed themselves by lawless action, and would permit no one to stand in the path of their escape. The very grim

silence with which food had been given me intensified my feeling that no mercy was contemplated. They would use me; would command my knowledge of navigation; would compel me to guide them to the exact spot chosen — and then! What? The answer was a blank, a silent horror into whose mystery I could not even look.

I had been sailor long enough to accept the ordinary perils of the sea as part of the profession. Moreover, my experience had been such as to make me feel that any form of danger might be encountered along the ocean highway. Nothing was too strange to be true at sea; and so it was not the position in which I found myself; not the possible fate of the *Indian Chief*, or of her captured officers, which weighed most upon my mind — it was Vera Carrington. If those villians scuttled the ship; if they took to the boats to save themselves, leaving us to drown like rats, what would they do with the girl? Would McCann dare to take her with him? Would he venture leaving her alive to bear witness to his crime? There was but one answer — not unless she was utterly in his power. Either he must ruin her by force, and thus crush her spirit to his will, or else compel her to marry him, and so legally seal her lips. And the man was perfectly capable of taking either course — whichever seemed easier.

This was the consideration which served partially to arouse me from coma. I could not continue to sit there waiting for Fate to approach; better far to go forth and meet it in manly fashion. I had a good strong knife in my pocket, and the lock of the door was a

common one, the wood surrounding it soft pine. There was nothing in that obstacle to prevent my escape, and if I was discovered at large, my punishment would merely be confinement elsewhere. I had therefore nothing to lose, but everything to gain by the experiment. There was no key in the lock, for I could perceive a gleam of light in the outer cabin, although the opening was not sufficiently large to enable me to observe movement. Nor did my ear at the slight orifice distinguish any sound of occupancy. McCann would scarcely leave the cabin without a guard under the circumstances, but the hour was late, the night had thus far been a quiet one, and it was quite probable the fellow, comfortably situated, was drowsing at his task. Anyhow I would make little noise, and the chance was worth taking.

The labor proved easier than I had supposed. The soft pine yielded easily to the sharp blade, and a very few moments sufficed to cut the lock clear, enabling me to open the door silently and take cautious survey of the main cabin. The table had been hoisted, leaving the entire central space clear, and the swinging lamp was turned so low as to leave all the corners in obscurity. At first I doubted the presence of anyone, and had, indeed, ventured forth before perceiving the form of a man outstretched on the divan surrounding the butt of the mizzen mast. The fellow was asleep, yet restless enough to be dangerous. His face was in shadow, and I thought it best not to venture close enough to identify him, although the dim light revealed

a belt about his waist, and the bulging butt of a revolver. Convinced that my only hope of accomplishment lay in the discovery and release of my fellow prisoners, I crept across the deserted cabin, and entered the passage leading forward. Somewhere amidships these were surely confined. But I was not destined to discover where.

I had taken scarcely a step when the companion door opened, and a man started down the stairs. Crouched in the darkness I saw the sleeping guard, aroused by the noise, spring upright, and as the light fell on his face, I recognized a seaman named Dubois. The man on the stairs paused, gripping the rail, staring down as though momentarily blinded by the light.

"Is that you, Dubois?" he asked in the harsh croak belonging to Jim White.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And, damn you — you was asleep."

"I lay back to rest, but I was not asleep, monsieur — non, non."

"Well, we won't fight over that now. You're the only Frenchman on board, and we want you on deck. Go on up; I'll stay here. Aye, man, yer better leave the gun."

"Vat iss it, Monsieur White? Why they want me on deck?"

"What's the difference, you frog-eater? But I'll tell yer anyhow. There is a cruiser showing up off our port quarter which has caught sight o' us. She looks Frenchy, and if there is a hail it will be up to you to

answer — you are the only one aboard this hooker who talks the lingo like a native — see!"

Dubois stood staring, his lips parted in sudden terror.

"A French warsheep; eet hail us?"

"Not yet; but they are bound to question us, all right. There! did you hear that? A shot across our bows, politely asking us to heave to; aye! and we are slowing down; come, hurry up on deck with you Frenchy."

"But — but, monsieur, what ees it I can say? I know not ze words, ze — ze explanation."

"You speak French, don't you?"

"Oui, monsieur, oui, but — but I know not what to speak."

"Well, don't let that worry you. McCann will tell you — but God pity you, Dubois, if you fail to repeat it. Up with you now, and be lively about it!"

The Frenchman disappeared, and White, opening one of the larboard stateroom doors, passed in out of sight. Evidently he perceived nothing to alarm him within the cabin, and was eager to view the approaching vessel through an open port. All thought of my former purpose vanished from my mind as I realized this new chance of rescue. At any risk I must attain quickly to the open deck, where I could create an alarm sufficient to awaken suspicion on board the approaching Frenchman. If they could be made to send a boat to investigate the chances were the nature of the *Indian Chief's* cargo, and the unnaturalness of our being in these

northern seas, would result in the ship being made a prize of war. McCann's only hope of escape lay in some satisfactory explanation, which would lull the suspicions of the French commander — some lie smooth enough to prevent boarding and search. Nor did I doubt the fellow had the wit to play such a trick; quite probable, indeed, his story had already been worked out carefully in anticipation of just such an event as this — a plausible tale, convincing in its details.

Assured that White was beyond observation of any of my movements, I crept cautiously around the stair rail, and noiselessly mounted the steps. The light behind me in the cabin burned so dimly, I ran little danger of being seen as I slid back the door of the companion, and squeezed my body through the narrow space. Indeed, if noticed by any eye, the chances were I would be mistaken for one of the crew. But I found the after-part of the main deck deserted, although forward of the main mast I could perceive dark blotches along the port rail where members of the watching party were observing the approaching of the French cruiser. Crouched against the cabin front, I could perceive nothing of the other vessel except a trail of black smoke visible against the stars, but the *Indian Chief* was already nearly stationary, merely retaining steerageway, and rising and falling lazily on the swell. I could hear men walking on the poop deck almost directly over me, and occasionally the sound of a voice, but was unable to distinguish the words spoken. With heart beating like a triphammer, I made my way along

the front of the cabin, until I ventured to peer over the port rail, secure that my presence on deck was screened by the deep shadows in which I lurked.

The gleam of the stars alone revealed the glittering surface of the sea, but the night was clear of fog, and the black outline of the French warship was plainly visible, approaching us at half-speed, and silently closing up the narrowing gap of water between the two vessels. Not a glow of light illumined the gloomy decks, yet I could dimly perceive moving figures on the bridge, and glimpses of white in the fighting tops where the gun crews mustered in readiness for action. The ship was no larger than our own, indeed scarcely attained our height above the water, yet there was something grimly sinister about the monster's appearance — its silent, cautious approach; its grim inarticulate threat of destruction. I felt the heart come up into my throat as I gazed spellbound, every nerve in me throbbing painfully. A single voice echoing along those decks yonder could blow us out of the water. Even as I stared at the grim spectacle, the slim figure of a man appeared at the end of the bridge, and a voice hailed us in French.

"Ahoy there! what ship is that?"

There was a shuffling of feet above me; then McCann spoke in English:

"The American freighter *Indian Chief*, bound for Liverpool."

"Is there anyone aboard who speaks French?"

I heard them hustle Dubois forward to the rail, and

caught a word or two of McCann's swift threat hissed into his ear; then the frightened Frenchman stammered out an answer.

"Oui, monsieur, je parlé Francais."

"Then talk up; what ship is that?"

I could hear McCann prompting, and Dubois echoing the words put in his mouth.

"The *Indian Chief*, of Boston, McCann, master, from St. John's to Liverpool, two days out."

"With what cargo?"

"Miscellaneous; mostly farm machinery."

A searchlight suddenly swept us fore and aft, but finally settled on the little group of men clustered together at the poop rail.

"You're north of your course."

There was an instant of hesitation; then Dubois' explanation:

"We ran before the storm last night, monsieur, having been struck by lightning."

"Ah, I see; that accounts for your stump of a foremast and the temporary wheel aft. No other damage done?"

"No, monsieur, the ship is seaworthy."

The figure of another man joined the officer at the end of the bridge, and the two talked a moment; then the same voice called:

"Ahoy there! what shape are your boats in?"

"Three of them left, monsieur."

"Send the captain, with the Frenchman, over with the ship's papers. Be lively about it."

"Oui, monsieur; what is the name of the warship?"

"The French cruiser *Des Cartes*, on patrol. Get your boat over."

What would McCann do? Was he ready for such an emergency as this? Had he taken the precaution to alter the ship's manifest, or even forged a new one? I hesitated to cry out a warning, hoping that the papers submitted would arouse the Frenchmen to send a prize crew aboard, and crouched down in my corner, so as to avoid discovery in the glare of the searchlight. There was a moment of excited talk on the deck above me; then McCann descended the starboard ladder, and disappeared through the companion, evidently after the ship's papers. Liverpool's voice ordering the watch to lower number five boat, and stand by, sung out from the poop rail. Still uncertain what action to take, I remained crouched within the narrow space between the rail and cabin, avoiding the glare of the searchlight, which constantly swept the decks to give the officers on the bridge of the *Des Cartes* view of what was occurring on board. McCann emerged from the companion, called up to Liverpool, waving his hand with a laugh full of confidence, and went forward. A moment later he was joined by Dubois, and the two men clambered over the rail and dropped into the lowered boat. His actions, his easy manner, startled me; those must be carefully forged papers in his pocket to enable him to proceed with such confidence. Slowly I lifted myself until I could peer over the side at the dark expanse of water between the vessels. The searchlight of the warship

rested in a glare of white on the small boat bobbing up and down, revealing the men at the oars, and McCann and Dubois in the stern sheets. Neither glanced back, but I could see their faces clearly, and McCann was smiling as though at an excellent joke.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CRUISER LEAVES US

I WAS still clinging to the rail, and staring down at the light; I heard nothing, felt no premonition of alarm, when suddenly a hand gripped my throat, the great fingers stifling every effort to cry out. Before I could resist, or even brace myself, another hand was clapped over my mouth and I was fairly hurled back below the shelter of the rail, dragged across the black deck, and thrown through the opened door of the companion. This was accomplished so quickly, and with so little evidence of struggle, as to attract no notice from the Frenchman, from whose deck no doubt every eye was fastened upon the approaching boat. Half hurled, half dragged, I plunged into the dimly lit cabin, and it was not until I struck the lower deck that I even realized clearly what had occurred, or who were my assailants. I fell sprawling on one shoulder, but was as instantly on my feet, bruised, but otherwise uninjured, maddened by a rage beyond all control. White, emerging from the stateroom, through the port of which he had been viewing the scene alongside, startled by the sudden uproar, a revolver gripped in his hand, was the first face I saw.

"What the hell — " he exclaimed in bewilderment, but before he could say more my fist jammed into his

jaw, and the fellow went over full length on the deck, the gun flying from his opening fingers. I had possession of it before he could stop me, and was backed against the door of a stateroom opposite, murder in my heart as I confronted the two who had flung me from the top of the steps. I recognized them now for the first time — Liverpool Red and Tom Dugan. But one thought seethed in my brain — to kill.

"Damn you both," I cried, covering them as they shrank back, "we'll end this thing right here."

Red gripped Dugan, holding the Irishman in front of him as a shield. My revolver covered them both, my fingers nervous on the trigger. Suddenly the door behind me yielded and I staggered back, unable to regain my balance until fairly within the stateroom. With a crash the door closed, instantly shutting out the surprised faces of the two men in the cabin; a key creaked in the lock, and Vera Carrington fronted me, her back against the wood.

"Were — were they trying to kill you?" she panted.

"They certainly did their best," I answered, "but it was my turn when you dropped me in here."

"You — you mean that I made a mistake — that you were in no danger?"

"I had the upper hand. I took this revolver away from White, and do not believe either of the others were armed. In another second I should have fired. Our only hope of rescue lies in creating an alarm; there is a French cruiser lying just off our port quarter."

"A French cruiser! We have been captured?"

"No; merely halted and questioned. The Frenchman does not even suspect anything wrong. I was endeavoring to sound an alarm when those fellows seized me, and threw me down the stairs into the cabin."

"But how did you get on deck? And where did you procure the revolver?"

"I cut my way out; the gun was taken from White. Don't block the way, Miss Vera! I must get to the deck again, or it will be too late."

"Is McCann out there?"

"No; only Red, and a sailor named Dugan. White is knocked out, and McCann has gone aboard the cruiser. He has forged papers with him. Let me go; I can fight my way through with this gun. Those devils will either make way, or get hurt."

She stepped aside, and with no other thought but the necessity for swift action, I turned the key in the lock and flung the door open. The main deck was deserted; to my surprise, all three of the men had disappeared. With revolver gripped in one hand, I stepped forward, searching with suspicious eyes every dark corner, dimly conscious that the girl followed. Her fingers touched my sleeve, yet the strain of the moment was too great to permit of my even glancing about into her face. I had attained to the foot of the stairs, even advanced a step upward before my progress was arrested. Suddenly the companion door was flung open and a mob of men confronted us, surging in through the narrow space from the deck. I drew instantly back, stunned by sight of McCann in their lead, realizing

instantly that our effort to attain the open was already too late.

"There he is!" he cried eagerly. "Get him, you men. Lively now; there's no danger; if he lifts that gun, he's a dead man."

I was staring straight into the black muzzle leveled at my head, but before I could move, or even determine what was best to be done, Vera stood between me and the mob on the stairs.

"Go back! back into my stateroom; he'll never shoot me. Please, please go back."

I was hot-headed enough to have fought them all, but to attempt resistance then would have endangered her life. I retained sense sufficient to know this, and that only force would cast her aside. I heard McCann mutter an oath, and Red roar out some order, punctured with profanity, yet did not truly comprehend what efforts were being made to block our retreat. Before a hand could grasp either of us we were within the shelter of the stateroom, and the girl had closed and locked the door. Fists pounded on the wood in impotent rage, and I heard voices urging others to bring implements with which to batter their way in. My mind seemed to return to me with a flash, and I pressed the girl aside, facing the frail barrier creaking beneath the assault.

"McCann," I shouted, "call off your men! I have six bullets here; and by God! there'll be six of you dead if you break in this door."

There was silence; then a mutter of voices — one

angry with threat; others seemingly urging compromise. My ears caught but a word here and there, something about the need of a navigator, together with another suggestion that perhaps the Frenchman might not yet be beyond sound of pistol shot. Whatever the argument, the advocates of peace seemed in the majority, for out of the hubbub McCann spoke loud enough to be plainly heard.

"There is no use of your threats, Hollis," he said, rapping on the door, "we have weapons as well as you, and you cannot fight alone against the whole ship's crew. The best thing for you to do now, is to listen to reason."

"What has become of the French cruiser?"

He laughed, and I could hear Liverpool join in rather noisily.

"Five miles to leeward, and going strong. She'll be out of sight in two hours. There's no hope for you there, my man."

"You showed forged papers?"

"Aye; that was easy enough; you never supposed I was such a fool as to overlook that, did you? We are from St. John's to Liverpool, with a miscellaneous cargo. The Frenchman hadn't been in port for two weeks; all his news was wireless. The fellow swallowed my yarn as though it was sugar candy. And the best of it is, that is the only war vessel patrolling these waters; we have a cinch."

"Not without me," I answered calmly, after a pause in which my mind gripped the situation. "The tell-

tale compass shows you are three points off your course now. I'll talk with you, McCann, but if I continue to navigate this ship it will be at my own terms, and you'll either give me what I ask, or we'll fight it out here and now. I don't care which course you choose; only there will be some dead mutineers if I unlock this door."

"What are your terms?"

I took time to think, determined to demand every concession I dared ask, assured that I held the winning hand.

"Well," I said finally, "this coast to the west of us is no joke at any season of the year, and there are sea-currents along here to fool any seaman. You can take the chances if you want to, but it is my belief you fools will have this ship on the rocks within twenty-four hours, if you trust in blind reckoning."

"Damn it," sung out Liverpool hoarsely, "we don't need no sermon on the dangers of the deep. If we didn't need yer, yer'd a been a dead one long ago. Stow the gaff, an' tell us what yer want."

"I will," I snapped back. "The freedom of the ship for both myself and Miss Carrington. No interference, mind you, and our pledge accepted that we will not attempt to communicate with any other prisoners on board. Our meals are to be served privately, and the lady is not to be addressed by any one of you."

"My Gawd," exclaimed a muffled voice, "you don't want much! Who are you, the Czar of Russia?"

"I am the rightful captain of this ship," I returned stiffly, "and the only man on board capable of navi-

gating her. You can accept my terms, or leave them; and those are not all. McCann, I am talking to you, not that sea scum."

"All right; go ahead. What else?"

"I am to retain this revolver for protection, and the key to my stateroom; Miss Carrington is also to retain her key. When you men desert ship, which I know you plan to do, the *Indian Chief* is to be left in seaworthy condition. That's all."

"Enough, I should think. You must consider your services indispensable. However, I accept the terms, providing you agree to do what we ask in return."

"The same as before?"

"Yes."

"That I navigate the ship to within fifty miles of St. John's; notify you when we reach that point, and give you correct sailing directions."

"That is what we want."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing I know of now."

"Good, I accept. Take your men out of the cabin."

I stood motionless, still gripping the revolver in one hand, listening to catch every sound the other side of the closed door. There was a muttered discussion, the words mostly inaudible, although I heard enough to convince me that McCann was urging acceptance of my conditions on the ground that it would be impossible for me, alone, and under surveillance, to add to their danger. Some words were added in so low a tone as to fail to reach my ear, but whatever they were, they

evoked a laugh, and seemed to restore the dissatisfied to better humor. Liverpool took sides with McCann in the dispute, and the two united must have prevailed, for the men finally dispersed, and we could hear their heavy sea boots tramping up the stairs. The cabin became quiet as though deserted, although I had little doubt but that a guard had been left behind.

Relieved of the strain, I turned to meet the questioning eyes of the girl.

"That — that was better than fighting — wasn't it?" she asked almost anxiously.

"Yes; I lost my head for the moment, and could only think of reaching deck, and shouting an alarm to the cruiser."

"It was too late for that."

"Yes; we know it was now, and probably I would never have reached there alive. I am very thankful to you."

"To me!" her lips smiled, although her eyes remained grave. "Why I merely opened a door — besides even that act was supremely selfish."

"I cannot conceive how."

"You do not? Yet surely you can realize what it would mean to me to be left alone on board with — with Fergus McCann."

"He has ventured — "

"Only to my imagination perhaps. He has made no advances as — as yet. Do not think that, for really I ought not to accuse the man of this evil. Only he has alarmed me. I hardly know why. Trifles have occurred

which I would never have noticed under other circumstances, but — but I have reason to fear the man."

"Sometimes a glance is more of an insult than the plainest speech."

"Yes; that must be what I mean. I so despise the creature that I shrink from even looking into his eyes. It — it was to avoid meeting him again that I locked the door."

"He talked with you, then?"

"Yes, at the table. We were alone for a moment and it was his manner which frightened me rather than any words said. In speech he seemed courteous enough, except that he boasted of his power on board, and tried to impress me with the thought that I was helpless except for his protection. I became so nervous I could remain with him no longer."

"And McCann? he made no effort to restrain you?"

"He had no opportunity to interfere. I left the table without speaking. He — he followed me, however, and tried my stateroom door."

"Saying nothing?"

"No; it was locked, and — and he laughed, and went away."

I crossed over, opened the port glass and looked out. The sea was specked with sunshine, but the horizon was blotted with mist, which made me suspect the brooding of a storm. I turned to again meet her eyes.

"I suspect the man is almost as much afraid of you, as you are of him," I said quietly, "and he is puzzled what to do with you."

"Afraid of me — why?"

"Well, if you were not aboard his problem would be a much easier one to solve. The lives of none of the rest of us would weigh much in the calculation."

"And you think my life does?"

"Undoubtedly. McCann is a villain by nature; he was born with criminal instincts, which have no wise been changed by the possession of wealth. They were fairly well developed even in the environment of New York, but, when the fellow became suddenly plunged into this adventure; when he found himself utterly outside the limits of the law, with reckless followers behind, he completely ran amuck. His hatred of me, and desire for revenge, probably were the earliest factors leading to action. I doubt if he realized in the beginning any such result as this. But now he is fully awake to the peril of his position. The fellow is a coward back of all his bluff, and I do not think his criminal instincts are bloodthirsty. But he has drifted into a desperate situation, from which he must extricate himself at any cost."

"You mean — oh, not that?"

"I mean there is but one sure solution — dead men tell no tales."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PLAN TO SAVE OURSELVES

SHE stood with hands clasped, and parted lips, her eyes wide open with unconcealed horror, for the moment unable to utter a word.

"You — you actually think that, Mr. Hollis? You mean he would be willing to — to murder all on board to protect himself?"

"If assured such an act would bring safety, I do not believe he would hesitate at even that crime. Indeed I have no doubt he has contemplated it; perhaps has already planned its accomplishment. To be perfectly plain, Miss Vera, it is my judgment that your presence on board presents the only problem unsolved."

"My presence! Why he has no cause to fear me. No one knows where I am. If I never appeared alive again not a soul could ever account for my disappearance."

"True, and probably McCann is fully aware of these conditions. But he wishes you alive, not dead. That is what makes the problem. I may be mistaken, Miss Vera, but this is the conclusion I have reached. I do not say that Fergus McCann loves you; I doubt his capability of really loving anything other than himself; yet he admires you and is attracted by you; his conceit makes him ambitious to overcome your dislike,

and he is not blind to the fact that you are the only daughter of a multimillionaire. Do you realize now how valuable you might be in his view?"

She crossed the narrow space of deck, and grasped my coat in her fingers.

"Oh! this is too terrible! He — he cannot imagine it possible —"

"And why not?" I interrupted. "He is all powerful on board. He judges the virtue of others by his own standard. He dreams that you might even make that bargain to preserve life."

"That I would marry him?"

"Marriage would seal your lips; would win him safety, and also your subjugation and wealth. It is a stake worth playing for surely."

"And the others? What would be the fate of you and the others if I made that hateful bargain?"

"In no way different, I imagine, from what it will be if you refuse," I said soberly — and my hand closed on hers. "McCann has no intention that we shall ever put foot on shore. He would be a fool to permit such a thing. The crime he is already guilty of is of too serious a nature for him to run that risk. He may have to spare a few men in order to save himself, but they will be those who will not dare to talk for fear of their own necks."

"You think it all planned out?"

"In detail; McCann, Liverpool, and White know exactly what they intend doing. Their questioning of me, and their scrutiny of the chart, convinces me of this.

I even believe now I could name the other men of the crew who will be in their boat, when they abandon the ship — Dugan, Dubois, Sachs, and the negro Watson, with perhaps two others I am not so sure of. Why, Miss Vera, you heard what I was compelled to assent to a moment ago. I am to pilot the *Indian Chief* to within fifty miles of the harbor of St. John's, timing our arrival at that point to some hour of the night. I am to give McCann notice beforehand of our arrival there, and furnish him with exact sailing directions to complete the course. This means that the crew expect to abandon the ship there, and take to the boats. There are enough remaining in good condition — and just enough — to carry them all, but the *Indian Chief* will be left with none to rescue those of us left on board in case of accident to the vessel."

"And you anticipate accident?"

"I believe the ship will be deserted in an unseaworthy condition — either with her bottom pierced, or her sea-cocks open; and that those of us left aboard will be so confined as to be practically helpless to save the vessel from going down."

"And the men in the boats will get ashore, scatter and never be heard from again. No one will ever learn what became of the *Indian Chief*, or that we were aboard?"

"The French cruiser will report having spoken us at sea. That will be the last word. Of course shipping circles will realize that something was wrong aboard, or the ship would not be in these northern waters, sail-

ing under false papers, but the truth will never be made clear. Our fate will be another sea mystery, never explained."

"Some of the crew might talk later — in liquor."

"There is always that danger, and McCann is far-sighted enough to guard against it as far as possible. The most of them will never get ashore, except by accident. The few men he really trusts — men so deeply involved in the crime they dare not talk — will be in his boat; they will have the correct sailing directions, and the others will be furnished with false ones. The boats will easily become separated in the darkness. If the others are ever picked up it will be accidentally by some ship at sea — and there are almost no ships in this ocean. There are few flaws in the plan, as I have figured it out."

She did not answer, her eyes on my face, her expression exhibiting the horror she felt at this vivid picture which I had drawn. Then she slowly, gently, withdrew her hand from my grasp, sinking into a chair, her head bent forward.

"You — you really believe they actually plan to do all this?" she asked at last, as I remained silent.

"What else can they do? They dare not bring the ship into any civilized port. Surely you cannot believe that any crime would be too heinous for McCann to commit, if he felt it would save him from exposure and punishment, do you?"

"No; yet I can scarcely conceive of this — this wholesale murder. And what — what about me? You

suggested that — that marriage might save me from this fate. Do you think so ill of me as to imagine I would ever consent to such a bargain?"

"What I may imagine has nothing to do with the case, Miss Vera. My thought, and that of Fergus McCann, is not liable to be the same on any subject. The only hope he can have of ever winning you is through threat. The opportunity is now here for him to resort to terror. No doubt he judges your nature by his own. He possesses power and can assail you with deadly peril. It is my belief that he contemplates doing so."

"That he will offer me choice of marriage with him, or death?"

"Yes, it will not be put in just so brutal a form, for the fellow has a certain polish over his villainy; but it will mean that."

"Loan me the revolver."

"For what purpose?"

"To kill the brute, if ever he dares such a proposal. Mr. Hollis, I would die before I would ever permit his touch! My God! could you think this possible of me? that I would ever be party to such a contract of dishonor? Marry him to save my life! Why, I am so ashamed I cannot look you in the face; cannot even find words to express my detestation of such a suspicion."

I stepped forward, and my hand gently rested on the bowed shoulder.

"My dear girl," I said earnestly, "look at me, and

believe my words. Lift your eyes; I want you to read the truth in my heart. I had to tell you this, for this test is surely coming, and you need to be prepared to meet it bravely. It is not your life alone; it is mine also, and the lives of nearly all the others aboard, which are at stake. For the sake of us all I am going to ask of you a sacrifice."

There had been a mist of tears in the uplifted eyes, but as I paused this had vanished.

"A sacrifice?" she stammered. "That I marry that man?"

"God forbid! No; but that you encourage him to think it possible."

"Oh, I could not — I could not! Do not ask that of me."

"But, listen," I urged eagerly, forgetful of all else in the earnestness of my plea. "Vera, listen before you make decision. The only possible hope lies in the freedom of one of us aboard. I can so juggle figures as to keep the ship safely at sea for another day and night, but no longer. McCann knows enough of navigation to check me up if I venture too far in deceit, and he will suspicion a trick like that. This will be all I can do to delay the end. In spite of their pledge, I shall not be free; every step I take will be watched. They have never even left the cabin without stationing a guard. In spite of my parole McCann will never trust me; yet in honor I cannot break my pledge to have no communication with the other prisoners. Surely you see the situation I am in — the utter helpless situation?"

"Yes," breathlessly, every trace of color gone from cheeks and lips, but a new light in her eyes. "I—I begin to understand."

"Someone must be free to act, and plan. I cannot, nor any of those men confined amidships. Masters might, but the probability is he is not permitted to leave the engine room or even talk to his stokers, except to give orders. Besides he has no information which would make him suspect the whole truth. You understand; that is why I explain the situation so fully to you. By winning McCann's confidence; by seeming to yield to his desires, you will be allowed freedom on board. You can demand it as the price of your surrender. All else must depend on your woman's wit."

"But—but could I convince the man of my sincerity? I—I detest him so."

"He will want to be convinced; your mere consent will satisfy him. You must not look at this from your standpoint. He is conceited and cowardly. To save his own life he would be guilty of any treacherous act. He will judge you by his standards. There will be no necessity for any pretense at love; you need not even permit him to touch you. Merely allow him to believe that fear makes you an unwilling victim."

"You—you actually wish me to do this? play this hideous part?"

"Only because of our desperate situation; we must fight with the only weapon at hand. There is no other course open."

"And—and once free, I am to tell the engineer?"

"No; if you ventured into the engine-room you would arouse suspicion at once. Besides Masters is without force of character; he would be useless in such an emergency. Nor is it probable you could reach the others unobserved, although you might locate them, and, at night, convey to their hands some means of escape. This you must learn for yourself. The one thing I have in mind is — someone on board free to release the prisoners immediately after the boats leave, in time to enable us to prevent the ship's going down."

"But — but, Mr. Hollis, would — would he not insist upon my going with him in the boat?"

I walked twice across the narrow space of deck, conscious that her questioning eyes followed me.

"Yes," I admitted, pausing to study her face. "You might even be obliged to do that. You must front this possibility, although the necessity may be avoided. But McCann's boat will make St. John's. He dare not resort to force once you are ashore. The fellow is not fool enough for that, and any man you appealed to would stand in your defense. I do not count that a serious danger — only he must not suspect your purpose until too late to prevent his interfering with your action. Nor will you be unsafe with him in the open boat, for the two of you will not be alone. Your greatest peril will be while aboard this ship, and completely in McCann's power."

"The open boat will not be long at sea?"

"Not to exceed a few hours probably; Liverpool and White are seamen enough to see that it is equipped

with a sail, and if the wind be favorable, they will make land quickly. But there is even a chance that you need not take this risk."

"What chance?" the full measure of her emotions finding evidence in her voice.

"If Leayord or Olson could be secretly released, or even if you could be assured that I was free to attain the deck at the proper moment, and thus able to release these others, we might best play a bold game. By urging some excuse you could delay leaving the ship until after all the mutineers were over the side, and in the boats. McCann might remain on board with you, but he would be only one man to handle. Once we had control of the ship, we could defend the decks, and prevent those ruffians from returning on board, at least until they surrendered all arms, and agreed to such terms as we offered."

"That — that would be a most desperate expedient," she said dejectedly, "its success doubtful. You would be terribly outnumbered, and without weapons."

"I do not see it so. Outnumbered, yes; but with every advantage of position. Those fellows could not clamber up the side, unless it be one at a time. Besides the major part of the crew are doubtless mutineers against their will, and would be glad enough to return to duty if promised protection. I doubt if there be three revolvers on board. I have one of these, and McCann carries another. I shall hide mine where it cannot be discovered, and taken away; and if we succeed in keeping McCann on the ship until after all the

men are in the boats, we shall have his gun also in our possession. Really the plan looks feasible to me."

She arose, and crossed over to the open port, gazing out in silence across the waste of waters, the wind lifting strands of her ruffled hair. She remained there motionless so long I became impatient.

"Have you no answer to make?" I questioned at last. "You think the scheme impracticable?"

"No; it is not that," but without changing posture or glancing about, and I felt there was a deadness in her voice, far from encouraging. "All that you have planned might be done. I see no flaw, unless I should fail to perform my share of the adventure. But — but I do not like the part assigned to me."

"You fear you might find it difficult to carry out the deceit?"

She turned and faced me, and there were tears in her eyes, which she swept indignantly away with a swift gesture.

"You have used the right word," she exclaimed, no longer hesitating in speech. "I am not accustomed to deceit, Mr. Hollis; I have never learned how to lie, or conceal my true feelings. I doubt if I can do it even now to save lives; indeed, I doubt if even the preserving of my own life is worth the sacrifice of my sense of honor. I am not afraid physically; it is not that; but you ask me to permit this fellow to make love to me, and I am to encourage his hopes, and pretend to yield to his advancements. You ask me to lower my womanhood, to take my place on a level with a girl of the

streets, and pretend to sell myself for a price. Is this your conception of my character?"

It was as though she had slapped me in the face, yet I was ready, half anticipating she might assume this position.

"No; but I believe you willing to sacrifice your conception of what ordinarily seems right to save this ship, and the lives of those aboard; to preserve Philip Bascom's fortune. You cannot decide the question of duty by the rules of New York. We are in a desperate condition on the high seas, utterly helpless except for your efforts. Besides you overestimate the indignity. There need be no love-making, no pretense at love. You seemingly yield to force, surrender to fear; that would be the only way in which McCann would expect to gain your consent."

"You — you wish me to do this?"

"It appears to me as our only hope."

"And if I do, you will not despise me? You will not feel my action unwomanly?"

"I feel that of you? Never; why it would be impossible for me to conceive of your acting unworthily!"

She held out her hand.

"Then I will try," she said simply, her eyes uplifted to mine.

CHAPTER XXIX

WORDS OF LOVE

MY hand clasp tightened, and the long lashes shaded her eyes, concealing from me the mystery of their depths, a brighter color flooding her cheeks. Outlined against the open port, and the blue of the water beyond, the fresh young beauty of her face was almost a new revelation. The words she had spoken, her manner, her sudden surrender to my wish, perplexed me, and completely overcame my effort at self-control.

"Why did you ask me that?" I questioned, scarcely aware of my words.

"What?"

"If I would despise you; would deem your act unwomanly?"

"Because — because I had to know. It does not even yet seem right to me — altogether. I — I could not do such a thing unless you approved."

"You have faith in me then?"

"Yes — yes; I — I believe in you."

"And you mean you would have refused to take such action if I had not urged it upon you, and had failed to assure you that doing so would in no way lower my respect for you?"

Her eyes flashed up questioningly into my face, only to be instantly lowered again.

"Yes."

"Not even to save your own life?"

"I have always felt there were conditions more to be dreaded than death," she answered slowly. "Mere association, such as you describe this adventure to be, with Fergus McCann, may not be such a condition — yet I shrink from it. For I abhor a lie, and above all deliberate treachery. I can scarcely conceive that even fear of death will justify such action. I have chosen my course, not because it may preserve my life, but for the sake of the others helpless on board this miserable vessel; because of the crippled man locked in his own cabin; because of the mother praying for him in Philadelphia. Oh! Mr. Hollis, can you not understand?"

"Yes; believe me I understand. I only fear I never before knew there was such strength of womanhood in the world."

"You mean that! you feel what you say?" the girl's voice had a new note of confidence. "You have not merely expressed confidence in me in order to achieve your purpose?"

"I could not speak anything but truth to you. Vera, why do you question me like this? Why should you hesitate, doubt, when you realize, as you must, that only through you, and your power over McCann, Philip Bascom's life and fortune can be saved?"

"Because I would not save them at the cost of your respect."

"Mine! you think that of me?"

"Yes," she said, and now her eyes met mine frankly. "I think that of you, Robert Hollis."

This avowal quietly, honestly spoken, sent the hot blood tingling through my veins, yet left me for the moment speechless. I could not, dare not hope that her words meant all they seemed to mean. She must have read the bewilderment in my face, for she did not hesitate.

"I realize how you have looked upon me from the time of our first meeting on the dark deck of the *Esmeralda*," she said, her emotion evidenced only by a tremor in the soft voice. "I have been to you a mere girl. No; do not interrupt with denials, for it is better I should go on. That was your thought of me, as it has been the conception of other men. I believe Fergus McCann considers me from that viewpoint also, and hence possesses such faith in conquering me through fear. I must appear childish, perhaps act so, to leave this impression upon the mind. But I am not a child; I think and feel as a woman; indeed, I have cause to believe that my life — lonely and without companion of my own age — has made me older in experience than my years. Why do I confess this? Because I believe the time has come when you should know. I am going to carry out your desire; I am going to outwit Fergus McCann, and overcome his villainy. I am going to lower myself; renounce my ideals, for your sake."

"Mine! oh, no; you cannot mean that — there are others."

"Yes, there are others. I sympathize with, and am glad to serve them. Yet their fate alone — even my own peril — would never have led me to make this decision. You — you have asked it of me, and you have said to me — honestly, I believe — that such action on my part will in no way lower me in your esteem. I trust you, and am willing."

"You care, actually care that much for me?"

"Is there any disgrace, any unwomanliness in saying so? We are in desperate stress, all of us. Even death may be but a few hours away. If we are saved it must be accomplished almost by a miracle. This is no situation to be ruled by social conventions, or lack of frankness in speech. I do care for you, Robert Hollis; you would have known it long ago if you were not blind in such things. I may appear to you a girl, but I have a woman's observation and experience. I have not failed to see and understand; that is why I am unafraid now to tell you the full truth. You have cared for me ever since we were in the boat together. Is this not so?"

"Yes, but I never thought — "

"Of course not; you are not the sort of man who would. You have not made a life study of women; perhaps that is why I trust you so thoroughly. But I knew, even if you said not a word; I read it in your face, your manner; in the way your eyes followed me about. Sometimes I believe it was your silence, your lack of confidence in yourself; the absence of conceit in your nature which won my response. If — if you had made love to me, Robert Hollis, I would have laughed

at you; but — but now I do not feel like laughing at all."

"You do love me! you — you love me?"

"Oh, you mustn't compel me to say that! It is enough to confess I care; that I am interested. If it was not for the desperate chance I am about to take I should never have said these words. They sound unmaidenly, immodest; but you will not place that construction upon them. We simply must understand — you and I. I cannot go to Fergus McCann pretending to yield to his desires, to conform to his wishes, without you comprehend first of all that I do this not even to save my own life, but — because I love you. I know what has stood between us; what has sealed your lips; what has made you hesitate, and kept you silent. It is my father's millions. Well they are not here; on this doomed ship, facing death together, we are simply man and woman."

"And you love me? you really love me?"

"As woman never loved before I believe," she answered gravely. "I love you."

I know not what time passed as I held her in my arms, and whispered those words repressed so long. Almost had I forgotten where we were, the nature of our surroundings, the fate which threatened us. I could remember only her, the velvety touch of her flesh, the welcoming light of love in her eyes. I know not what we talked about, conscious only of the joy of being alone together, with every barrier between us swept away forever. The sunshine poured in through the open port,

touching her hair with threads of golden light, and leaving a bar of brilliance across the stateroom deck. Beyond I could see the wide stretch of ocean, deserted and desolate, the waves crested with silvery foam, and a deep blue in their hollows.

Yet I imagine the respite was not long. There came a sharp rap upon the wood of the door, bringing us instantly back to a realization of our position. Her arms released me, and I arose to my feet.

"What is wanted?"

"It's a few minutes till noon, sir," said a voice I failed to recognize. "And I'm to tell you to come on deck."

"Quite right, my man, I'll be there at once. Stand by to carry the instruments."

"Aye, aye, sir."

There was a certain cheerfulness and respect in the voice, which convinced me the fellow was not among the ring leaders, but the hope of making him an adherent to our cause vanished when I opened the door, and recognized Dade. The man was too weak, too much of the jellyfish, to render his friendship of any particular value. Besides Dugan was also in the cabin, leaning idly against the stair-rail, but quite as evidently on guard. I nodded to him, but he only condescended to stare in return, and the look in his eyes convinced me that he had not yet forgiven the rough treatment accorded him a few hours before. The memory made me smile.

"I've seen you when you looked happier, Dugan,"

I said carelessly, "but I imagine you have nothing on Jim White."

"To hell with yer," he growled savagely. "If I had my way ye'd have no tongue left to get smart with. Get along now after yer things."

Dade followed me into the captain's stateroom. He was obedient enough, but reluctant to talk, no doubt afraid of being overheard by Dugan. The latter remained below as we passed out through the companion onto the deck, and I wondered what his orders were regarding the girl. Now that they had me out of the locked stateroom, and the two of us peacefully separated, the chances were strong that McCann would prevent our ever being together again. Yet, in spite of this fear my heart was light, and I possessed a new feeling of confidence and hope.

The conspirators were grouped on the after-deck waiting my arrival, and I followed Dade up the ladder, determined they should perceive no change in my demeanor, which might awaken suspicion. White, I noticed, was not present, but Liverpool and Dubois stood beside McCann, close to the port rail, while the negro, Watson, was at the wheel, the whites of his eyes conspicuous as he lifted them from the binnacle card. McCann's manner was far from cordial as I approached, but I thought it best to ignore his churlishness.

"You were long enough coming; perhaps you still think yourself in command?" he said savagely.

"That would indeed be a stretch of the imagination," I replied, holding my temper, and motioning Dade

where to place the sextant. "However I do not think I have wasted any time — it is still two minutes of twelve."

He growled something, but I busied myself with the observation, only anxious to make it accurate enough for my own use. Whatever figures I reported, it was absolutely necessary that I know myself the exact position of the ship. Nor did I dare to juggle them greatly in my report, for while McCann was far from being an expert navigator, he yet possessed a smattering of knowledge, which rendered him dangerous, and he was very sure to check up my figures with every care possible. He stood beside me now, observant of each movement, his few questions breathing suspicion. However I fooled him by a point or two, sufficient for my purpose, and wrote down the result on the back of an old envelope, while stowing away the correct figures in my own brain. The three compared the position given them with the chart, discussing it in low tones, while I crossed over to the rail indifferently, and took a survey of the sea.

Although the air was balmy enough, the wind from the southwest almost directly in our teeth, yet there was a look of the north about both sea and sky, which would have convinced me that we were approaching higher latitudes without the aid of my observation. Without being able to explain the phenomenon the seaman instinctively recognizes northern waters. Now, as my eyes swept the wide circle of the horizon, vainly seeking the gleam of some distant sail, the heaving expanse

of water, the over-arching sky were almost alike in color — a cold, repellent blue, misting into gray afar off as though particles of fog filled the atmosphere. Indeed it was this which interested me the most, this vague evidence of floating vapor, for I knew enough of these seas to suspect that this might prove the forerunner of storm, already preparing to sweep down upon us out of the more northern mystery. Others must have noted the evidence also, for Liverpool crossed the deck to where I stood, leaving McCann with the chart in his hands.

"What do yer think o' that sorter mist out yonder?" he asked, indicating the distance by a sweep of the hands, and striving to make his gruff voice sound friendly.

"It may mean nothing," I answered civilly enough. "I have never sailed these waters, but my guess would be that there is a storm brewing to the north of us. What does the barometer say?"

"A slight drop in the last two hours; nothin' much yet, but it don't look good to me. We ain't so far off the coast accordin' to the chart; yet I suppose there's searoom enough in every other direction."

"Hundreds of miles."

McCann joined us, the chart still half open.

"There seems to be plenty of harbors along this Newfoundland coast line," he said. "Do you know what they are like?"

"Only what the map says. The whole coast is rugged and rocky, dangerous for any vessel larger than a fish-

ing schooner. There are government mail boats calling at those smaller towns during the summer months."

"How far are we to the north of St. John's?"

I used a pair of compasses from where I had marked a red cross on the chart.

"Two hundred and fifty miles, approximately."

"Which makes us about due east of this White Bay indicated here?"

"Yes; but there is not even the name of a town given; all that country is wilderness I take it. Why do you ask? I thought you had decided on St. John's."

"So we have," in no pleasant tone, and crumpling up the chart in both hands, "but I thought if there was a more quiet port to the north it might be safer. There are apt to be warships at St. John's. However we will keep to that course." He turned to Liverpool.

"Where's White?"

"Forward somewhere."

"Have him come aft, and take the deck; it's time for dinner."

I shall never forget that meal — not the first, but the last time we were all together about the table in the after-cabin. Not that anything occurred of special interest to this story, but I doubt if ever a stranger company, under stranger circumstances, was ever gathered together, even at sea. McCann rapped at Miss Carrington's door, and she received his invitation to join us with a graciousness of manner which must have surprised the man. However his conceit would never permit him to doubt the lady's incentive, and he escorted

her to the seat of honor at the table, with all the ceremony of a New York drawing-room.

Liverpool, who sat at the lower end, his uncombed red thatch more conspicuous than ever, appeared decidedly ill at ease, but his presence failed to embarrass the rest of us, or interfere with the game. Dade, at McCann's orders, helped Philip Bascom from his cabin, and found him a place at Miss Carrington's left, directly opposite the New Yorker, the two men greeting each other with a stiff bow. I had not seen Bascom for some days, and could not help being impressed with his appearance of illness, his face having a positively ghastly look. Yet he seemed equal to the occasion, entering into conversation with the lady, and even occasionally addressing a remark to McCann, who replied in assumed good humor. Dade and the boy Moon served, performing their duties skillfully, although the vessel pitched some, indicating a rising sea. Wine was served, although previously I had no knowledge of any being on board, and the party developed into a rather pleasant occasion.

I do not recall the topics of conversation, as all reference to our present situation was avoided, McCann's object evidently being to win back confidence in his purpose, and impress Miss Carrington with a new idea of his character. He worked to this end skillfully, devoting most of his conversation to her, and broaching various subjects of mutual interest. The girl played her part equally well, and I could read Bascom's bewilderment as he endeavored to join with them in the same

spirit. To relieve his embarrassment I managed to keep up a desultory conversation with him, although my thoughts were busy enough elsewhere, endeavoring to figure out the meaning of all this by-play. It was a decided relief when the party finally broke up, and McCann conducted the lady back to her stateroom, pausing for a final farewell word at the door.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DEPTH OF DESPAIR

McCANN'S manner changed instantly with the closing of the door, although he indulged in no remark, except to order Liverpool to take charge of the deck, and permit White to take his place at the table. He passed me by without a word, or glance, and disappeared into his own stateroom, the farther one aft to starboard. I waited until Dade had assisted Bascom to retire, and then sought my own berth to think the whole affair over.

I felt that I understood the situation fairly well, and the tactics displayed by both sides in this little dinner party. Miss Vera had gone somewhat farther than I had anticipated, at first; but her rather sudden change of manner had evidently aroused no suspicion as to her object. No doubt she knew the real nature of the man better than I, and could be trusted not to overstep his credulity. Bascom's appearance shocked me, and I felt there was a death look in his face, but our own perilous position kept my mind from dwelling long on this theme. There was little — nothing in fact — that I could do. I must be content to leave Vera to evolve some means for the final overthrow of these men who held us prisoners. Dubois remained in the cabin on guard, probably with instructions to prevent my holding

any private interviews, and the only assistance I could give lay in the juggling of figures, in which I could not be too cautious.

The main doubt assailing me had come from a dim suspicion aroused on the deck by McCann's questioning, and a sly glance exchanged between him and Liverpool. Were the fellows really contemplating making a landing elsewhere on the Newfoundland coast, instead of at St. John's? This was not impossible, and the fact that it would take us thoroughly by surprise would appeal to the conspirators. There was a case filled with books, mostly of a geographical and technical nature, in the stateroom which McCann occupied. Possibly some volume there referred to the Newfoundland coast, and the fellow might have gained from it information I did not possess.

In all probability there were a number of towns, not marked on our imperfect chart, along the shores of White Bay, and also Notre Dame Bay to the south. A boatload of shipwrecked sailors could land at either place, and find some means of disappearing before news of their arrival reached civilization. Yet I discovered absolutely nothing on which to base such an assumption. McCann was evidently in no haste to reach the latitude of St. John's, and take to the boats, for the *Indian Chief* was proceeding with greatly reduced speed, and, as the afternoon wore slowly away, it seemed to me we were scarcely moving, the reverberation of the screw being barely perceptible. To assure myself that the course I had mapped out was still being adhered to, I

ventured into the cabin for a glance at the telltale compass. We were headed to the west of south.

The man Simms was on guard, lolling against the butt of the mizzen mast, with no one else visible. He was a dull, stolid fellow, and to test his orders, I turned toward the closed door of Miss Carrington's stateroom. Instantly he was on his feet to interfere.

"You are not to do that, sir."

"Not to do what?"

"Speak alone with the lady; those were my orders."

I raised my voice in remonstrance, but had scarcely uttered a word, when McCann emerged from his stateroom, leaving the door ajar, and crossed the deck to face me.

"What is the trouble here, Simms?" he asked, the harshness of his tone differing greatly from the pleasant conversation at dinner.

"Mr. Hollis was going to rap on the lady's door, sir."

"Oh, he was, hey! Well, now see here, Hollis, you understood that you were to have no communication with any prisoners aboard, didn't you?"

"I was not aware that Miss Carrington was considered a prisoner."

"Well, whether she is or not, she is no longer to be bothered with your attentions," with no attempt to control his temper. "You knew perfectly well that she was included in the terms of your parole."

"How should I? I was with her when the parole was given."

"What of that! I am not here to discuss the matter. I consider that you have broken your word. You will go back to your stateroom, and stay there."

"Supposing I refuse?"

He grinned, exposing his teeth like a great cat.

"I wouldn't advise you to try that," he sneered, "for there is crew enough on deck to man-handle you to a finish. You can go in quietly, or I'll call them down, and have you thrown in. So take your choice."

I looked at the two of them, eager enough myself to make it a fight. Yet what was the use? An open rupture could serve no good purpose; I would be overcome by numbers, perhaps seriously injured, and such a struggle would only handicap the girl. Besides, something in McCann's words and irritating manner aroused within me a suspicion that he hoped I would be goaded into resistance. Perhaps it was with that object he had so promptly joined in the mess. Any excuse enabling him to confine me more closely would evidently be to his advantage. These considerations flashed across my brain as Simms grinned at me, his right hand flung back as though gripping the revolver undoubtedly in his hip pocket. McCann, pretending a coolness I am sure he was far from feeling, sat on the edge of the table, one foot dangling. God! how I would have liked to smash him one, putting all my hate into a single blow between his sneering eyes. But I conquered myself, and hands clinched, crossed the deck space, and entered my stateroom, closing the door. I heard McCann laugh, and say something to Simms; then I knew he crossed the

cabin, and went up the stairs. To better control myself I thrust my face out through the open port, breathing in the salty freshness of the air.

Suddenly I became aware that others had entered the main cabin. There was no sound of voices; nothing to tell me the purpose of this invasion, yet I felt certain that, at least, a dozen men had descended the steps from the companion. I stood erect listening; there was fumbling at my door. Had McCann changed his mind? were they about to attack me in force? Revolver in hand I took a step forward, half-ready to welcome any open hostility.

"The first sea rat to open that door," I called, "will get what's coming to him."

There was a mocking laugh in answer, in which more than one voice joined; then White growled reply:

"No one is a' comin' in, Mister; an' damn me, if you're a goin' ter get out."

I grasped the knob, throwing my whole weight against the wood. It yielded scarcely half an inch, just enough to reveal a stout bar. This time I was a prisoner beyond doubt; they had left me no loophole of escape. But why? What had I done to warrant them in breaking their pledge? Could it be that McCann had no further use for me? no desire for another observation? If this was true, then it must be the men proposed deserting the ship that very night, and taking a chance at getting ashore in one of those northern bays. And they had nailed me in to die like a rat in this hole, when the *Indian Chief* went down.

For the instant, as this fear gripped me, I was dazed and incapable of thought; helpless to even clearly comprehend the full horror. I do not believe it was my own situation which so completely unmanned me, but the remembrance of Vera. What would become of her? She would be alone in McCann's power without a human being to whom she could appeal. She would be forced into the boat despite her struggles, laughed at, and mocked. She might even be compelled to witness the slow sinking of the ship carrying us down into the depths. And then — what? At St. John's, in the midst of a civilized community, there might be hope of her finding friends, or at least, a rescuer. But not on that wild coast to the northward, where there was no one to whom she could appeal. She would be no better off ashore under those conditions than on board the ship, or in the small boat. The vision I conjured up was agony, and I sank back upon the stool, my face buried in my hands.

It is not even yet clear in my mind how the remaining hours of that afternoon passed. I was conscious only of a mad, impotent rage. Wild schemes flashed through my brain, only to fail of execution. I was tightly trapped, and everything which occurred led me to the same conclusion — the quarrel in the cabin, the fastening of the bar across my door, had all been prearranged. It was part of a previously thought-out plan. McCann had never intended giving me the freedom of the ship, even under parole. He had apparently yielded to my demand to induce me to make that last observation, and

figure out our position on the chart. But as soon as that had been done I was no longer of any use on board, and he had gladly accepted the first excuse offered to render me helpless. There could be only one reason for such action on his part — desertion of the ship, that same night. If the mutineers were really, as pretended, intending to land their boats in the harbor of St. John's, they would require my services for at least another day yet. No one else on board could place the vessel at the point designated. Their actions, however, plainly evidenced that I was no longer needed, and that their plans had been changed.

Indeed no one held communication with me all that afternoon; occasionally I overheard movements in the cabin, but could scarcely peer through my door, and was unable to ascertain who were present, while the few words distinguished brought me no specific information. That some movement of secret importance was going on aboard seemed more than probable. The sound of footsteps on the upper deck over my head proved that an unusual number of the crew were busily engaged aft, while several times I caught the echo of orders, and the creaking of blocks, convincing me that the small boat tackle was being overhauled and tested. I also became impressed with the conviction that food supplies were being conveyed from the lazarette to the boats and stowed away.

Supper was served early in the cabin, but was evidently more of a lunch than a meal, no attempt being made at formality. McCann, Liverpool and Miss Car-

rington were at the table together, but, while I could differentiate their voices, conversation was carried on in such low tones, I could make little of it. Indeed, I do not think Red spoke at all, and the other two seemed to be discussing music as though interested in no other topic. When they left the table Vera went to the piano, and played and sang all the time White was eating. My little peekhole gave me a glimpse of McCann, leaning against the mizzen mast, his eyes upon her. No offer of food was made me, nor did I see, or hear Bascom; if he ate at all it must have been in his own stateroom. Finally the music ceased, the two exchanging a few apparently friendly words, before the girl excused herself, and returned to her room. It seemed to me there was already a cordial understanding between them, and I confess the thought was unpleasant enough in spite of my conviction that Miss Vera was merely acting a part at my own suggestion. Surely there was no necessity for her being quite so nice, or permitting him to think her altogether so weak of will.

Assured that the fellow was no longer below I indulged in a last glance through the round port. The purple twilight obscured both sea and sky, but there was no cloud overhead, no sign of brooding storm. The sea, while not calm as in more southern latitudes, was still not rough enough to peril the landing of boats. The night was evidently to be a pleasant one, stars already peering out through the purple haze; the ship moved majestically through the desolate waters, so slowly as to barely retain steerage-way.

I sat down to think again — hopeless, my mind on the same treadmill. Good God! what could I do? What effort of mine was possible? There was no means by which I could escape from the stateroom; I was like a rat in a trap, and McCann intended to leave me there to drown. Within an hour, perhaps; certainly before midnight, those devils would desert the ship, and take to the boats. By morning they hoped to be safely ashore on the Newfoundland coast, in a country almost without communication with civilization, a mere party of shipwrecked seamen — and the *Indian Chief* would never be heard of again. Already I was practically dead; certainly as helpless to prevent the consummation of this villainous plan as though fathoms beneath the sea. How deathly still it was on board. No sound of footsteps reached me from the deck overhead; no voice spoke even in gruff orders; no movement of any kind arose from the cabin. Suddenly it occurred to me that Dade had not even cleared the table; at least I had heard no rattle of dishes, or any evidence of work. Such neglect certainly must mean that McCann's plan was known to all aboard of his own company. The steward must realize that there was to be no breakfast served, no necessity for washing up; the dirtied dishes might just as well go down where they were, as polished and clean on the pantry shelves. I opened the door again, noiselessly, its scant quarter of an inch before it was stopped by the bar, and sought to look out. The space gave me no view; there was a light burning, but turned so low as to leave the cabin in semi-darkness. I waited listen-

ing, but no movement told of any presence. For the fourth time I tried my knife point on the bar holding me prisoner. It barely scratched the wood, for I could not force the handle through the narrow opening. I might smash it by shots from my revolver, but that would leave me unarmed, and create an alarm which would fill the cabin with men; besides the severed ends of the bar would still hold the door secure.

I straightened up, my heart beating like a triphammer. Something strange, unaccountable was occurring in the cabin. I could make nothing of it; not even satisfy myself that what I seemed to hear was an actual reality — yet there was a sound like a blow, followed by a barely audible groan, and the sliding of a body to the deck.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE HAND OF FATE

IT seemed an age I stood there, bending to the narrow crack, hearing no further sound, and unable to guess what had occurred in the semi-darkness of the apparently deserted cabin. I could distinguish no movement, not even the sound of breathing. Then a soft whisper spoke almost in my ear, causing me to start back as though stabbed by a gun.

"Robert!"

There was agony in the utterance sufficient to disguise the low voice, yet I could not doubt the identity of the speaker.

"Yes; I am here; what has happened?"

"Oh, don't ask that. I hardly know myself. It was all impulse, desperation. Listen; they are going to desert the ship within an hour. McCann told me. I — I let him believe I would go with him to save my own life. I — I didn't know what to do. All that was left me was to pray and watch."

"Yes, dear heart — but what happened? you must speak quickly. They all left the cabin, and went on deck."

"Yes; to provision the boats; they are lowering the two forward ones now. I was told to get my own things ready."

"No guard was left here below?"

"Only Dade; they knew you could not possibly get out, and they had no fear of me because I was so frightened."

"And what became of Dade?"

She caught her breath, the answer a sob almost inaudible.

"I struck him; dear, there was no other way. He — he hardly uttered a sound, but just sank off the divan onto the deck. Maybe I killed him, but — but I never meant to do that. I used the only weapon I had — an iron leg from my washstand."

"Don't worry; it was either his life, or ours. There is no one else then below?"

"Not — not now."

"Is there any way of loosening this bar? I cannot even determine how it is fastened; there were no cleats."

I could see her outline as she stood there, feeling with her hands; then realized that a length of iron was inserted between the wooden bar and the jamb of the door; there was a crunching sound, not loud enough to be alarming, and the bar fell, but was caught before it struck the deck. Instantly I was in the cabin, and had grasped her hands still clinging to the leg of the washstand.

"You brave, dear girl!"

"Oh, don't, not now!" she pleaded, drawing back. "What shall we do?"

I swept my eyes about — at Dade, huddled motionless on the deck, a shapeless heap; at the companion

door, slightly illumined by the faint flicker of a lantern forward. It was all desolate, sodden, the grim picture striking me like a blow.

"What do you know?" I asked. "Tell me as quick as you can."

"They are lowering the boats. He will be back for me in a minute."

"Yes, I know; but they mean to open the sea-cocks first?"

"I was not told; no one has come down this way."

"Whoever is given that job would use the main-hatch, or the ladder to the engine room. You do not know if all the crew are on deck?"

"No; I only went as far as the companion after McCann left me. I could see men from both watches, for it was not entirely dark then, and quite a few stokers were among them. Only one engine was working; I — I am sure of that."

"Yes, we only have steerage way — just enough to hold us to the sea. You neither saw, nor heard of Masters?"

She shook her head.

"I do not believe he is in charge. The man White yelled down the ladder to somebody, whom he called Tony, to use only the one screw — do you know a man by that name?"

"Aye, Tony Rappello, the head fireman; he could keep the machinery going. Now one thing more — where have they confined Leayord and Olson?"

"I haven't dared ask," she admitted. "I did not

suppose they would leave the ship tonight, and thought I might find some way to discover this for myself."

"You have no hint?"

"Only that the boy Moon carried food forward from the table while I was at the piano."

"Forward? on deck?"

"No; down the passage amidship."

"Good; that is what I supposed, and it gives us a far better opportunity to reach the men than if they were being held in the forecastle. They are in the petty officers' quarters, no doubt. Now, listen, dear. McCann may come for you at any moment. You must go back to your stateroom, so that he will not suspect. Leave the rest to me, but delay him in every way possible."

"Am I to go with him?"

"Only as a last resort. If I can release Leayord and Olson in time to act we'll block the game. This probably depends on how long you can keep McCann on board."

"He must not suspicion your escape."

"No; I'll attend to that." I caught her in my arms, and kissed her, feeling her arms twine about my neck. "You must go now, dear. You trust me?"

"With all my heart."

She crossed swiftly to her stateroom, stepped within, and partially closed the door, yet, I felt, stood there, watching my every movement. There was no longer hesitancy on my part; our lives hung on the next few minutes, and I had already determined what I must do,

and how. Action, the chance to fight, inspired me; I was no longer a caged rat, but a man able to cope with these villains face to face. The first thing to be done was to clear the cabin, so that anyone entering it would have no suspicion aroused. Time, time in which to work, was my one great need, and this could only be had while McCann believed me still to be a helpless prisoner. I caught up the wooden bar from where it lay on the deck, closed my stateroom door and, fitting the nails back into the old holes, drove them in tightly with the iron Vera had used to pry them free.

Dade was unconscious, but not dead. I only needed to touch his flesh to assure me of this fact, yet the fellow neither stirred, nor groaned, as I hastily dragged his body into the nearest open doorway. He should have been bound and gagged, but I could not waste the moments for that job, and satisfied myself with closing and locking the door. Then, for an instant, I stood, panting for breath, uncertain as to my next move, taking hasty survey. It was almost a surprise to me that I had not been already seen from above. I could hear, now that all was quiet, steps on the deck overhead — either those of the officer in charge, or the man left at the wheel. Any instant one of these might be tempted to glance down through the glass transom into the dimly lighted cabin.

Only some miracle, or the consolidation of their interest temporarily on what was being done forward, had saved us from discovery. Yet I could not remain there, almost in plain view. Where should I turn first?

Bascom would be of no value, even if I released him; my only hope of assistance lay in the two seamen. Gripping the iron bar, the revolver snugly stowed away in my pocket, I crept down the black passageway leading forward, glad to escape from the light of the cabin.

Whatever of desperate villainy was going on elsewhere in the ship, all was black and desolate enough down here. I had previously explored this passage when I first assumed command, and my mind retained sufficient memory to yield me confidence. There was a swinging lamp in front of the steward's pantry, but I dared not light it. Far better to grope my way forward, as there was no pitfall in the dark until the ladder leading down to the engine room should be encountered, and that was beyond the petty officers' quarters. It was a low, narrow tunnel, running so deep within the heart of the ship as to be absolutely silent. I could hear no ripple of water, and as the engines were working slowly, feel no vibration of the screw. Occasionally a faint, far-off hiss of steam alone reached my strained ears. I moved on, testing the deck with my foot, and feeling along the side with my hand. I possessed knowledge enough to realize where I was — this iron cover encountered by my feet concealed the opening to the lazarette; this first door, standing wide open, was Dade's pantry; opposite was his sleeping quarters, and beyond these was where the boy Moon bunked, and the three storerooms. I tried the doors, finding none of them locked, which assured me they were unoccupied. The carpenter's stateroom came next, and I stood hesi-

tating an instant before testing its latch, listening intently for the slightest sound.

Yet surely there were no guards posted here. They would be useless in such darkness; beyond doubt every man had been required to provision the boats, and get them overboard. McCann believed his prisoners were secure; that it was quite safe to leave them unwatched for the short period before deserting the ship. The very fact that the inefficient Dade had been left alone in the cabin to watch over Miss Vera, and myself, was evidence that he needed every seaman to carry out the work on deck. The measure of his confidence, his conceit, was what gave us this opportunity to act. My hand, fumbling for the lock encountered a bar, a stout wooden bar, extending from jamb to jamb, and my heart bounded madly. This was the place! I had found it already, and the men I came to release were imprisoned exactly as I had been. I tapped gently on the panel.

"Who is it?" Low as the whisper was, I felt convinced the speaker must be Leayord.

"Hollis. Stand by now; are you alone?"

"Yes; Olson and Masters are together in the bosun's quarters."

"Masters! when did they lock him up?"

"About an hour ago; he made quite a fight of it—that's how I knew what was going on, sir. Can you get me out?"

"Aye! I'll rip this bar off in a jiffy. Have you a light in there?"

"Black as the inside of a whale's belly, sir."

I got a purchase with my iron lever, and put my full strength to it. The bar was of oak, but the jambs soft pine, and the nails drew out, creaking slightly, but making no noise to create any alarm. It was so intensely dark I could not even perceive the outlines of the man's figure, yet felt aware that Leayord fronted me in the open door. He found my hand somehow, and gripped it.

"By God! I'm sure glad to meet you, Captain," he exclaimed heartily, "and get out o' that hole. Damn me, I feel as if I'd been stuck there a month. What's the word, sir?"

"Release the others, and get busy; minutes are worth hours now."

"But tell me what's up, sir. I'll work better if I understand the game."

"Only this," and my tone revealed my impatience, "McCann and his gang are deserting ship; they have the boats provisioned, and along side already; that is why the guards have been withdrawn."

"They were going to leave us aboard locked in?"

"Aye, and with the sea-cocks open; dead men tell no tales."

He whistled, his fist smiting the wood of the door.

"That damned hound! And where are we, sir?"

"Off the Newfoundland coast; they think less than fifty miles, but there's nearly a hundred miles of blue water to the west of us. Here's the way of it in a nutshell: McCann compelled me to take observations; then when he thought he had the ship about where he wanted

it I was locked in my stateroom the same as you. It was Miss Carrington who gave us our chance. She became friendly with McCann, and agreed to go with him. She was left free on board, and managed to release me while the crew were all on deck. The steward was left on watch in the cabin, and she had to hit him with this iron."

"She did! Lord, I'd never have thought it of that slip of a thing!"

"We've both of us got plenty to learn about women yet, Leayord. But we can't stand here and talk; there's work to do."

"Aye, sir, and I'm fit and ready; but what's become o' the girl?"

"She's in her room, waiting for McCann to come down for her. She'll delay him all she can. Is this the door?"

"Aye, aye, sir; and give me the iron."

He was not a minute at the job, and it required scarcely longer to acquaint the other two released men with a knowledge of the situation. Olson picked up the bar of wood for a weapon, asking simply:

"Vat we do now, Captain? Iss it to fight?"

"Hush!" whispered Masters, "there's someone coming up the ladder."

We crept back into the bosun's stateroom and waited breathlessly. There was scarcely room for the four of us, and the door caught, and would not wholly close. A dim light reflected along the walls of the passage, making me aware that the fellow who was slowly climb-

ing the iron ladder from below, had a lantern with him. Leayord retained the iron leg, and I drew my gun, holding it tight gripped in one hand. The man's head and shoulders emerged through the round opening, and his fingers reached for the cleat which would help him to swing over to the deck. The dim light enabled me to recognize Tom Dugan. He paused on the edge, looking down.

"All quiet enough up here," he called. "You better draw the fires, Tony."

"No use o' that," answered a sullen voice from a distance. "The water will fix 'em in half an hour; there's two cocks open. I'm goin' on deck; that damned millionaire don't git no chance ter drown me."

Dugan laughed.

"Always a thinkin' how to git out of a scrape safe. Yer got yer price, didn't yer?"

"Enough ter make me want ter live long 'nough ter spend it, anyhow. Are you comin' down this way agin, Dugan?"

"No; I'll have a look at the cabin on my way up; the boss doesn't want any mistake made. You better climb out, Tony; the boys are mostly in the boats now, an' thar ain't no more room than we need. There's nuthin' left ter do aboard this hooker; she's ticketed for Davy Jones."

He stared below a minute, as though to make sure of what Tony was doing down in the engine room; then, apparently satisfied, swung to firm footing on the deck of the passage, flashing his light aft. The radius was

small, and his glance must have revealed nothing strange, for the fellow whistled softly as he advanced. His cold callousness to the fate of the men whom he supposed to be helplessly confined in the rapidly sinking hulk, angered me, a sudden rage almost causing me to give utterance to an oath.

He was almost at the stateroom door behind which we were hiding before he even noted the absence of the wooden bars which had confined the prisoners. He stopped, a look of amazement on his face, the lantern swung higher to throw the light forward. Before he could move a limb, I had stepped forth into the radiance, the muzzle of my revolver held within three inches of his eyes.

"Don't drop your hands, Dugan," I said sternly. "Not an inch, you brute. Here, Leayord, take the lantern from him. Move quietly, all of you. Now, Olson, if there is a sheet in there, or anything you can make a cord out of, bring it to me — yes, take the lantern a minute. Good ! that will answer ; now lads, make it strong, a sailor's knot."

Dugan sputtered and swore under his breath, but the shock had robbed him of all power of resistance. I never saw a more amazed look in a man's eyes. He stared at us as though we were ghosts raised from the grave to haunt him.

"Anyone below beside Rapello?" I asked, gripping his shoulder so as to make him look at me. "Answer now, or I'll take means to make you."

"No."

"No, what, you fool! You are speaking to the captain of this ship."

"No, sir."

"That's better; you were the two last men left aboard, I take it; it was your job to open the sea-cocks?"

He nodded sullenly, as I dug the revolver deep into his cheek.

"You dirty murderer! where did you leave McCann? Twist his neck, Leayord, until he finds his tongue."

"On deck," he sputtered, "close by the companion; he — he was going down to the cabin after the girl. Tony was the only one left in the engine room, and I was sent along to see that he left the cocks open."

"The boats were all over the side then?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many of them?"

"Four."

"Where were they?"

He set his teeth, but the pressure of Leayord's fingers compelled an answer.

"Three o' 'em had got away, lyin' maybe a hundred yards out, and the fourth was still at the ladder, waitin' fer us to come over the side."

"This last one was McCann's boat? who were in it?"

"I didn't look over ter see, sir."

"Maybe not, but you know just the same. The men were all picked for the boats. Give me the names."

"Well, thar wus Liverpool, White, Dubois, Tony an' myself, the nigger, Watson, an' — let's see — Joe Sachs."

"Seven — with McCann and the girl — nine; not overloaded surely, and quite a picked company, worthy their chief. The other boats held more?"

"About twelve men each, sir."

Leayord's eyes met mine in silent understanding. He was seaman enough to instantly grasp the purpose of this unequal division — the lighter boat would be the better sailor, the easier operated in a heavy sea.

"Which boat was it you fellows chose?" he asked.

"The port-quarter boat."

"I thought so. What'll we do with Dugan, sir?"

"Throw him into the bosun's bunk, and then nail up the door. We'll give him a dose of his own medicine. Move lively; there's another job waiting us on deck."

CHAPTER XXXII

WE CAPTURE THE SHIP

THEY were in no way gentle about it, yet the work was noiselessly done, and with sailor-like thoroughness. Dugan undertook to curse, but was so instantly gagged that only the first muffled word reached me in the passage. Masters held the lantern, while the two mates refastened the door, driving home the nails with the iron bar. The moment this was secure I was ready for the next act.

"Give the lantern to Olson, Masters. You've got to look after the engine-room, and leave us to attend the deck job. There'll be those sea-cocks to see to first, and then keep enough fire under the boilers for steerage-way. Down with you, and don't pay any attention to whatever we do."

Heavy as he was he went down the iron rungs of the ladder like a fireman answering a call, and the three of us who were left behind in the passage, stared into each others' faces, barely visible in the dim radius of light.

"What next, sir?" asked Leayord anxiously. "There's only three of us now, an' forty-three o' them."

"One less — you're counting Dade, and he's safe enough. The boy Moon is of no account, and I imagine there are twenty men out in those boats who have no

heart in this business. They'd be with us now if they had any chance — isn't that so, Olson?"

"Yas, sir — but they won't likely git no chance."

"True enough; yet it is something to know that McCann and his gang cannot count on them either, if it comes to a fight. As things stand it is all a matter of luck and nerve. Three of the boats, with thirty-six men in them, are afloat, and far enough away, if it is a dark night, so that the ship is little more than a shadow. Those lads will see nothing of what takes place on board. There are only six in the boat hanging to the foot of the ladder, with McCann left alone on deck. We ought to be able to handle that bunch."

Leayord dug the iron bar he held into the deck planks savagely.

"What did yer tell Masters to only keep up enough steam for steerage-way for, sir?" he asked bluntly.

"I was afraid they might notice, if he fired up."

"'Tain't likely, so the funnels don't git ter blazin'. The only fellers with eny brains are in thet boat close in alongside, sir, an' they can't see nuthin' frum thar. Them common fo'castle rats in them other boats never would notice a bit more smoke."

"What is it, Leayord? You have a plan? Speak quick, man; we can't stand talking here."

"'Tain't not much o' a plan, sir," he explained briefly, "only I don't see why we couldn't just naturally heave this cuss McCann overboard, er else kill him just as you please. Eny two o' us could keep that quarter-boat crew from comin' up the ladder, an' then, if Masters

had his boilers het up, no damn rowboat could ever catch us. Thet would leave us one hand at the wheel."

It was true, the very simplicity of it making me curse my own stupidity. I stared into his face without uttering a word of comment, yet with my mind grasping instantly the necessary details. With a single step I was bending over the ladder peering down into the depths below. A faint far-away light appeared at the bottom.

"Masters!" I called, my voice thrown downward through hollowed hands.

I saw his shadow emerge into the circle of light.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Have you any pressure now?"

"Fairly good, sir."

"Well, stand by for all the steam possible, and give it to her the instant you get the signal — only be careful not to flame your funnels. You hear me?"

"Every word, sir."

"How did you find the water?"

"Ankle deep in the engine-room, and the bunkers fairly flooded. It's a' drawing off a bit now. There's no great harm done, sir, an' the wet coal will give me full steam in a jiffy."

"All right; stand by, and don't fail us."

"Now, lads," I said, standing erect. "First it's the after cabin, and then the deck. Douse the glim, Olson; we're better off in the dark. Follow me, and mind your footing."

The gloom was no handicap in that narrow space where we could feel either wall with our fingers, but I

emerged into the cabin with caution, fearing the possible presence there of McCann, who might even have brought a man, or two, back on board to assist him. The hanging lamp had been extinguished, or else it had burnt out from lack of oil, but there was a faint glimmer of light in Miss Carrington's stateroom, enabling me to discover at a glance that the main cabin was unoccupied. Her door stood wide open, but with no signs of confusion within.

What had happened? There was nothing to tell me the truth. Had McCann succeeded in inducing her to accompany him on deck? Had he taken her there by force? or, had the girl finally yielded to his insistence, after exhausting every form of delay, her last faith in my return having vanished? Nothing remained but to follow them, and find out what had occurred, and, if not already too late, attempt a rescue.

"There's no one here," I said in a whisper. "We'll try the deck; quiet both of you."

We reached the head of the stairs on our hands and knees. I had my revolver gripped in my fingers, Leayord his iron bar, while Olson had found a hatchet somewhere in the darkness. The companion door was but half closed, and I squeezed my body through the opening, assured no one occupied that immediate portion of deck. The other two followed noiselessly, and we huddled close together in the black shadow of the cabin. So still it was I could hear their breathing, and my eyes, trained by long service in the darkness below, were able to distinguish objects forward beyond the mainmast.

There was nothing living visible; to all appearances the ship was totally deserted; the last stragglers had taken to the boats. It was a black night enough, but with scarcely a breath of air stirring, and only a slight roll to the sea. The ship rose and sank rather sickeningly as in the tropics, the loose cordage slapping heavily against the yards aloft. I could only catch the gleam of a single star overhead, and the obscuring clouds hung low, and unbroken. It seemed to me the heavy atmosphere prestiged a storm before many hours; there was a sluggishness to it most unusual in that latitude. Olson, who lay next me on the deck jerked my sleeve, his uplifted hand pointing toward the starboard rail amidships.

"There's two of 'em," he whispered.

My eyes caught the indistinct outlines, unable for the instant to make them appear human. Indeed I was still in doubt when McCann's voice, with the old hateful sound in it, called into the darkness.

"Below there; are you still fast?"

"Aye, fast enough, an' blamed tired o' holdin' on," grumbled someone below testily. "Why don't yer come along down?"

"In a minute. Is every one in the boats?"

"I don't know nuthin' 'bout the steward; nobody ain't seen him yet, 'less he got in somewhar else; nor Tom Dugan. Tony sez he's in the cabin."

"Well, he isn't; I just come up from there. We won't wait for the damn fool. You flooded the engine-room, Tony?"

"Sure I did, with both cocks wide open; there's five feet o' water in her by now."

"Good; then it's time we're off. Send a hand up here to help me, Liverpool — the girl won't go along."

The men below laughed.

"Can't yer handle that little bit o' a thing, mister?" sang out a new voice, "without the help o' a sailor man?"

"Stow it, Joe Sachs," roared Red, and there was the dull thud of a fist blow. "Now up yer go to give the lady a lift, me lad. Jump er I'll take the tiller ter yer next."

Sachs must have started his upward climb, for McCann drew back from the rail, and, as he did so, the girl broke free from his grasp. The man, however, although apparently taken by surprise, was quick enough to get between her and the companion. She only escaped the grip of his hand by shrinking back against the rail. I was already on my feet, and, as McCann wheeled about, we fronted each other. What he thought I may never know, but the shock of thus seeing me must have momentarily paralyzed the fellow, for his eyes stared like those of a frightened rabbit, and his mouth remained wide open. But I gave him no time even to utter a cry of alarm, my only thought being to rid the deck of such scum. Before he could move to escape, or even throw up a hand in self-defense, I had him by the throat, my other hand twisted in his waistband. He was a man nearly, if not quite my own weight, yet, at that moment, mine was the strength of a giant, and with one mighty

effort I lifted him clear off the deck, as helpless in my grip as if he had been a child, and, with one desperate heave, swung him out over the rail, and let go. I staggered back, weakened for an instant by my own violence; I heard him cry out, the sound muffled in his throat as he fell; Vera gave utterance to a sob, and the whirling body struck the black water below with a splash plainly audible. Still gasping for breath, I leaned out and looked down. The only light was a lantern held up in the hands of a man in the boat at the foot of the ladder. I could see his face, and the dim figures of three or four others; beyond that narrow radius all was black. I could not even perceive Sachs, half way up the ship's side, yet I knew he was there, clinging tight, because of the tautness of the rope strands. There was no need to conceal the facts longer; we must fight in the open now.

"Leayord, come here," I ordered. "And you, Olson, take the wheel, and ring the engine-room for full speed ahead. Jump into it lads." I sent my voice below, stern with threat.

"Get down that ladder, Sachs, just as quick as God will let you. Let go, you man with the lantern, or we'll swamp you alongside. Do you hear the steam, Liverpool? It's full steam ahead, you fool!"

It was Red's voice which echoed back:

"Is that you, Captain? What happened? Who went overboard?"

"McCann; he's astern of you, and you better pick him up as you go. Move quick! You haven't a second

to lose. Good God, man, you'll be sucked under, if you don't let go!"

They were seamen enough to realize the imminent danger of their position. Liverpool and White both called out, and the others, grasping their oars, backed water furiously. I saw Sachs tumble back into the boat, and a face or two staring upward. Voices roared at us, the fellows cursing lustily; then the darkness seemed to swallow them completely, and I knew from the tremor of the deck planks that we were underway. I sprang to Vera, and lifted her to her feet.

"You are not hurt?"

"No, only frightened and bruised. He threw me to the deck. Are we safe? Have they all gone?"

"Yes, all who can make any resistance. Hold her just as she is, Olson; there's a bone in her teeth already; it will take more than oars to overhaul us. Does anyone know if those fellows picked up McCann?"

"I think most likely they did, sir; they wus swingin' the lantern alongside."

"Bring me the night-glasses, Leayord — aye, they're on the shelf in the captain's stateroom."

He returned with them before I had finished whispering a word of hope into the girl's ear, but even that short time had so broadened the expanse of water I could conceive few details through the lens. Three of the boats were close together, bunched as though their occupants were still unaware of just what had occurred; the fourth boat — the one we had just left, no doubt — was much nearer, and must be entirely out of sight of

the others. I got it fairly within my focus, but the occupants were indistinguishable at that distance; all I could be sure of was that the fellows were engaged in rigging up a jury mast for a sail, and that they were no longer attempting to pursue us, or making any effort to rejoin the other boats.

"Do you see 'em, sir?" asked Leayord, impatience overcoming him.

"Yes; Liverpool's boat is out there, heading due west, and the men are rigging a sail."

"And the others, sir?"

"To starboard, at least a quarter of a mile away."

"That's the game, then," he said, staring out into the blackness as though he saw it all. "Them fellows don't care a damn what becomes o' the three first boats so long as they git safe ashore. I'd bet they rather they wud drown than not. I wonder did they pick up that millionaire?"

"No reason why they shouldn't. He must have struck within ten feet of the boat. They wouldn't be likely to leave him behind, when he's their meal ticket if they ever get ashore."

"Where they heading for?"

"White Fish Bay."

"Well, they may git thar, if it ain't too fur. Thet's a good boat they're in, Mr. Hollis; an' Liverpool an' White are both sailors all right. I'll say that for 'em. But just the same they're a goin' to have ter show their train'n before many hours."

"You mean a storm? I don't like that mist myself."

"'Taint only that, sir; it's in the air; you kin sorter breathe it like. Besides I took a squint at the barometer when I went below — it's fallin' ter beat hell."

"Then we better look to our own safety; we are far too short handed to stow sail before a wind."

"I reckon there ain't so awful much to stow," with a glance upward into the blackness aloft. "There's only the jib, sir, left on her; an' she needs that, er else no one man could ever hold her wheel. Likely 'nough we may have to reef that canvas if it blows great guns; besides Masters can't git along alone down below; he'll have to have a fireman."

"All right; there are two men below deck now you can rout out and put at work."

"Two, sir?"

"Aye, Mr. Leayord — Dugan and the steward. The latter you will find in one of the staterooms aft; here is the key. I leave it to you to persuade the fellows to take hold."

"I'll do that, sir, with pleasure; and maybe, come the need, even the owner would give us a hand?"

"We will not count on Mr. Bascom; he could scarcely keep his feet in a seaway," I answered firmly. "But we have one more in the crew, nevertheless — Miss Carrington, here."

"The lady, sir?"

"Yes," she broke in eagerly. "Captain Hollis knows, Mr. Leayord, for he has tested my seamanship. I could take the wheel such weather as this. May I not relieve Olson now?"

"Yes," I said, feeling it best to encourage her enthusiasm, and truly possessing faith in her capability to handle the ship. "I'll keep you there while we get snugged away. Mr. Olson!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Let Miss Carrington relieve you. Stand by a moment until certain she has the trick of it; and then come forward."

"Aye, aye, sir," but less heartily, a strong doubt in his voice.

"It's all right, Olson; she'll hold her this weather. Now, Mr. Leayord, bring the other two men on deck."

CHAPTER XXXIII

WE SIGHT A BOAT

WHAT immediately followed; how we made ourselves shipshape the best we could, and held on for the next few hours, has comparatively but little to do with the interest of this story. I know I worked as hard as any of the others, convinced by a hasty glance at the steadily falling barometer that the time was not long absent when we would be struggling for life in the grip of a storm of no ordinary severity. Even without that guide, the increasing ugliness of the sky was sufficient warning to one accustomed to the moods of the sea. Yet, work as I would, the one dominant memory, as I look back now, is that of the slender figure at the ship's wheel, barely visible to those of us on the main deck below, as outlined against the slightly brighter sky, her hands gripping the spokes, her hair and skirts flapping in the wind. More than once I hailed her anxiously, fearful lest the sea, which was steadily rising, should make the strain too heavy, but only to receive cheerful response, and a refusal to be relieved. And there was so much to be done, I was not insistent.

Leayord brought the two men on deck, and as Dade was no sailor, but more likely to prove faithful, he was sent down the ladder to assist Masters in the fireroom. Dugan took the change in administration aboard with

sea-going philosophy, seemingly feeling no animosity because of the rough handling received, and went to work under my orders with hearty good will. We were all four of us capable seamen, and an hour of hard work placed the *Indian Chief* in very fair condition, so far as deck and running rigging was concerned. We even managed to reef the jib, and take an extra turn about the stowed canvas aloft before I felt reasonably satisfied that all was shipshape. At the end, however, standing on the forecastle, and staring aft, I had faith that we could handle the hooker, even with that small crew, and bring her safely into the harbor of St. John's. Our earlier weather predictions were not yet verified, at least to any serious extent. There was more weight to the wind, and less steadiness, while the sea was perceptibly rougher, the spray already flying above the forecastle head, and showering the deck forward. The girl had dropped us off a point to ease her arms, but the screw was working bravely, and the vessel answered to her helm like a thing of life. Indeed there was nothing particular to worry about, excepting that temporary steering apparatus, and it had worked long enough now so as to give me confidence.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Leayord?" I questioned, indicating both sea and sky by a wave of the hand. "Was it a circular storm, leaving us outside of its radius?"

"No, sir; it's not that," and he drew the back of his hand across his lips. "Dugan an' I talked about it on the mainyard yonder, an' 'tis our judgment, sir, that it's

just a slow brooder. There won't be no quick change, but the weather 'll just gradually get heavier until we're scudden' under bare poles. It'll be maybe termorrow night before we get its full weight."

"But you have no doubt we'll weather it?"

"Barrin' an accident, sir. We had to disconnect the chains and use ropes on the rudder; the best of hemp will chafe."

"New cordage?"

"Brought up from below hatches; as good as the best, sir."

"Then it ought to stand; we've had good weather of it so far. Mr. Leayord, you and Olson lie down within call and get some sleep. We'll have to doze as we can. I'll keep Dugan forward, and take the wheel myself for the next hour."

"Aye, aye, sir; when do you expect to make that port, sir?"

"St. John's? Well, we're a bit off our course now. I'm afraid we may be another night afloat."

He stood motionless, one hand shadowing his eyes, as he gazed out over the port rail.

"I was a' thinkin' o' them poor cusses out there in the boats, sir," he said finally. "I'm bettin' that most o' them wish they wus back on this deck by now."

"No doubt; but there's no way we can help them, and we've got our own work to do. You and Olson go below."

I watched the two disappear through the companion, spoke a word to Dugan, posting him where he could

hear me call if necessary, and then went aft to the wheel. I had not realized the full weight of the gale until I reached the top of the ladder, and stood erect without any protection from the cabin. For an instant I had to grasp the side rail, shading my eyes with an arm; then I struggled forward, until my hands gripped the wheel.

"Why didn't you call for help?" I asked. "This was too much for any woman. I never realized forward how it was blowing."

She swayed against me, clinging to my sleeve.

"It — it does kick some," she panted, "and I was almost afraid I might let go. I — I am glad you came. I couldn't hold to the course, but — but that doesn't matter, does it?"

"Not at all; we are in no shape to fight the storm, with only one man in the stokehole. You will have to creep to the ladder."

"You — you wish me to go below?"

"I order you to."

"And you are going to remain at the wheel — alone?"

"Dugan is forward, within easy call. I have sent the two mates below for an hour's rest. There is nothing for us to do now, but hold on until the storm abates. I'll simply lash the wheel, and stand by. You are absolutely exhausted, and must get below — you will go?"

"Yes; if — if you think it best. I am so tired — the strain of it; the fear I could not hold out —"

"I know." I bent and kissed her, and she clung to

me. "But do not think of that any longer; you must go to your room at once and lie down."

"There is really no danger?"

"Nothing serious; we must run for it, but as long as Masters can keep up steam, the ship is safe enough."

"But you will stay on deck all night?"

"Not unless the storm increases. In an hour or so I'll call the others, and lie down myself. Come, dear, you belong in the watch below."

That certainly seemed a lonely deck after she had disappeared down the ladder. I had served many a quiet watch at sea, many a memorable one, but that hour taught me the real lesson of loneliness. It was all black forward — and silent, except for the wind howling through the rigging. I knew Dugan would be there, wide-awake, crouched in some out of the wind corner, but I could see nothing of him. We were driving forward recklessly into a wall of darkness, utterly impenetrable to the eye. What horror might be lurking just ahead of the plunging bow, no imagination could picture. From where I stood, clutching the spokes of the wheel, I could not even trace the yards of the mainmast, nor could I perceive on either side the water through which we drove. It was all black, sea and sky of one solid color, not so much as a winking star visible; the only gleam of light aboard the faint glimmer within the hood of the binnacle. Yet it was not this which pulled so at my nerve. I had stood at the wheel often before guiding a great ship through impenetrable blackness, and amid the immensity of the ocean. But then I

was one of a crew, alert and ready, merely performing my part of a given task. But now I could not drive from me the consciousness that I stood there alone; that on all that space of deck forward only one solitary man crouched in the blackness; that below in the engine room, and stokehole, only two more, already worn and weary with toil, stuck grimly to their work; that under my control this great freighter, loaded almost to the deck beams, was flying before the storm, plunging through the wild waters of the mid-Atlantic, with death hovering above in the shriek of the storm. Yet I clung to it grimly, no longer making any attempt to hold any settled course, but merely choosing the easier way in which to meet the force of the storm. A few miles of drift would make small difference, and I knew so little of the ship under me that I possessed no courage to fight, for fear of a strained butt, or a frayed rope, which might leave us a helpless wreck at any instant.

It was two o'clock when, too thoroughly wearied to stand the strain longer, I sent Dugan below to call the mates. Leayord was the heavier man, and the more experienced sailor, so, at my suggestion, he took the wheel, while Olson went forward. I lingered only long enough to explain that we were again driving back along the same course we had come over, and to bid him ease the strain on the ship, regardless of the compass. I can recall creeping down the ladder, and staggering down the stairs, but nothing more. I must have been asleep even before I reached the berth in the captain's stateroom.

We Sight a Boat

A hand shook me, and I opened my eyes. For an instant I was too dazed to comprehend. The port was closed, but daylight streamed through the thick glass illuminating the stateroom, and I recognized Olson bending over me.

"I had to call you, sir," he explained kindly. "The main royal has broke loose, an' it'll take all hands ter stow it again in this wind; besides that feller Dade he's gin out entirely, an' there's got ter be another hand sent below to the stokehole."

I sat up, already thoroughly awake.

"What time is it?"

"Goin' on half after four, sir."

"Why I thought I had just dropped off. Any increase in the weight of the gale, Olson?"

"No, sir; I don't think the wind is quite so heavy, and it's gettin' more steady like, but there's considerable sea."

"I can tell that the way the ship pitches; she's taking water forward."

"Tons o' it; the damned hooker is loaded so deep she's more like a wharf than a ship."

It was a wild scene enough when I emerged from the companion and paused a moment in the protection of the cabin to view the deck forward. Huge crested waves burst over the forecastle heads, cascading down onto the main deck, and sweeping aft to the scuppers amidships. The vessel staggered under the repeating blows, yet recovered with a buoyancy which gave me renewed courage, plunging forward again to meet the

next assault. There was no creaking of timbers as in a wooden ship, but a dull reverberation as the great waves struck us fiercely, and burst into blinding sheets of spray. I made no attempt at looking to windward, but in every other direction appeared tumbling water, gray and hideous in the dawn, the crest of the racing billows seeming to almost touch the sky. The continuous boom as they struck against our bows, the mad flapping of the loosened canvas aloft, the ceaseless shrieking of the cordage, made a pandemonium of noise which rendered the human voice almost useless. I put my lips to Olson's ear.

"Can the three of us pass those gaskets?"

"It's got to be done, sir, unless we let the sail go; but it's goin' to be no boy's job."

"Where's Dugan?"

"Hangin' there to the shrouds, a' waitin' for us."

"Then come on; the sooner it's over with, the better."

We went up the ratlines like snails, every burst of wind driving us flat against the ropes, where we hung on grimly. Again and again the very breath seemed sucked out of me, yet we made progress, but there was no pride left to prevent our clambering through the lubber's hole. Dugan was first to lay out upon the footropes, and I felt no regret when Olson slipped past me in the top, bawling in my ear:

"Let me go next, sir, you haven't been at this sort o' job lately."

However, I made it in my turn, the wind driving me flat against the spar, the footrope dancing madly

beneath my weight, the flapping canvas of the loosened sail as stiff as iron. Dugan had the worst of it, but he clung there like a cat, stubbornly fighting inch by inch as he drew in the cloth. He must have had the strength of a giant, and the grip of a vise. The ship plunged so under us we seemed to fairly sweep through the air, and I looked down dizzily into foaming water directly underneath. The slack came into my hands, as Olson gripped it with fingers and teeth, and I drew the lashing taut, passing the end of the cord on to the others. It was a ten-minute battle, and when I got safely back into the maintop every muscle of my body throbbed with pain, and I sank down against the mast, struggling to regain my breath. I had my head buried in my arm, conscious only of the wild leaping of the mast, and the sickening sensation caused by its constant swaying, when Dugan's shout sent the blood pounding to my heart. He stood upright, clinging to a stay, staring forth into the smother off the port bow.

"Good God, sir! There's a boat! See, yonder; she'll top the crest in a second — there!"

I had a glimpse of something — a black speck in the midst of the breaking spray — but could not be sure of what it was.

"Are you certain it is a boat?" I questioned. "The thing had no shape to me. What do you say, Olson?"

"A boat, sir; there was a slip o' sail hoisted; it's my notion she's hoved to, ridin' to a drag. There she is again."

Aye, I got a fair view that time, as the cockle-shell

was thrown high up on the crest of a wave. It was sickening to see that black object hurled high up against the sky, and then disappear utterly into the hollow. The boat must be hove to; there would be no living otherwise in that sea, and the very fact that it remained afloat was evidence of sailors aboard. I drew myself to my feet, clinging with one hand to a stay, hollowing the other to make my voice reach the deck below.

"Mr. Leayord!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"There is a small boat off the port quarter, riding to a drag."

"A what, sir?"

"A ship's boat off the port quarter — too far away to tell what's aboard her. Can you let her head fall off a point?"

"Not without another hand at the wheel; it takes all my strength to hold her as she is."

"Jump down, Dugan, and lay aft; we must get that boat to leeward, if we help those fellows in this sea."

"Aye, aye, sir."

He scrambled over the top, but Olson and I were content to use the lubber's hole, reaching the deck later, and glad enough to be there alive. I dived into the cabin after a glass, stopping long enough to explain what we had sighted to Vera, who appeared in her stateroom door, fully dressed.

"You have not been in bed?" I asked, indignantly.

"Oh, but I have; indeed I have. Why I must have

slept four hours, but I lay down fully dressed. I—I didn't know what might happen. Could you see if there were men in the boat?"

"No, not to distinguish them with the naked eye; the glass will reveal that; but the boat must be occupied to keep afloat in this sea."

"Who can they be, do you suppose—shipwrecked sailors?"

"It would be my guess it will prove to be one of our own boats we've overhauled."

"But how could we?"

"The wind changed after midnight, and, with only the one hand at the wheel, we were obliged to pay off, and run before it. It is not impossible that we are back in almost the same section of sea where we left those fellows. Come up on deck, and we'll know shortly."

She went in for a wrap, but joined me almost immediately. Nothing could be seen of the distant boat from the level of the maindeck, but I compelled the girl to remain under protection of the cabin, while I clambered up the ladder to the higher elevation of the poop. Here, braced against the rail to keep from being blown overboard, I swept the waters with my glass, eager to verify my suspicions. The sun was up, but the atmosphere far from clear, while the restlessness of the sea made it difficult to gain proper focus. I must have been five minutes locating the boat, yet finally caught it fairly on the crest of a wave. Even at that distance two recognized faces leaped instantly into the circle of vision—Liverpool and McCann.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A DEAD MAN IN THE CABIN

THE glimpse was but for an instant, the boat disappearing as it dropped into the hollow.

"It's our own quarter-boat," I announced shortly, endeavoring to keep my glasses trained on the right spot. "McCann, and those devils with him."

"Then, shall we stand by, sir?" asked Leayord. "Why should we be picking up that scum?"

I glanced aside at him.

"Why, Mr. Leayord? Well, one reason is, we are American seamen. Those fellows can scarcely hurt us now, and a hand or two more aboard will help us to make port. We've got to have firemen below, and Rapello would be able to spell Masters in the engine room. I look on their coming as a Godsend. Let your helm off another point — there, steady now; hold her just as she is."

Again I caught the boat in the focus of the leveled glasses; it was measurably nearer now, but I could only see four men aboard the craft, the other two being White and Rapello. The cockleshell danced so desperately it was impossible to keep it fixed in focus for more than an instant at a time. How it had ever survived the night, and conquered those raging seas, passed my understanding, and was evidence enough that real sail-

ors held control. Nor, even at that distance, were the marks of struggle missing. The tiller was gone, the man at the stern, Jim White, steering by means of a long oar; the sail had been whipped into rags, and a canvas shirt substituted. One man was on his knees bailing furiously, and Tony had an arm in a sling. So intent was I in this endeavor to decipher the details of the tragedy through the glass, I was unaware that Vera had climbed the ladder, and now stood beside me, clinging to the rail. Her voice aroused me to her presence.

"Why, there are only four of them?"

"Yes; they must have passed through hell last night," I answered. "Here, take the glass; there are two bodies lying in the bottom of the boat."

"Can you manage the wheel alone for a bit, Mr. Leayord?"

"I can try, sir."

"Miss Carrington, would you mind giving the mate a hand?"

She fought her way across to him without a word, leaving the glass on the deck.

"Good; hold her as she is, and have Masters slow down. It is going to be a ticklish job to get those fellows on board; has anyone a suggestion?"

"A running noose from the lower main-yard, sir," said Olson.

"That will take only one at a time."

"Two, if they're quick enough about it; but it's the only way, sir. That boat wouldn't live a second close in alongside."

"Right you are; you and Dugan lay out on the yard and get the whip rigged; pick a strong cord and see that it fits the pulley block. I'll keep to the deck, and ease them in. Pass the end down to me; lively now."

Those in the boat saw what we were attempting, realizing at once that we meant to take them aboard. The relief felt was instantly expressed by the waving of hands, and a faint cry reached us across the water. McCann even endeavored to stand up, but was jerked down again. No doubt the recognition of the ship had left them in total despair of rescue, their one thought being that we would permit them to drift by, rather than take them aboard again. The gap between us slowly closed, I could see their faces clearly, uplifted in agonized appeal. They were haggard, crusted with salt, piteous enough in their silent pleading to make me forget the past.

"Boat ahoy!" I roared. "Keep well away from the side; we'll whip you in from the main yard. Have you oars?"

"One pair, sir."

It was Liverpool, and I was glad to note the tone of respect in his answer.

"Then hold her back, and drift in slowly stern first; you get the idea. Are those dead men?"

"One of them is; Dubois has his leg broken."

"We'll send a sling down; put Dubois in first, and the rest of you stand by. Are you ready now?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Olson joined me at the rope, Dugan remaining out-

stretched on the yard, the ship held motionless except for the rise and fall of the waves. The boat drifted cautiously in stern first, held by the two oars in the hands of Liverpool and White. The former roughly assumed command.

"Get up there, McCann; on your knees now; for God's sake don't miss that rope, and hold on hard; take a turn around that thwart amidships — no! don't make fast! Give Tony the end; he has one hand yet. Now get Dubois into the sling; damn you, man, you've got to; we can't leave these oars. Take a grip there, Dubois, and help yourself. That's better." He lifted his arm in signal. "All right, sir, swing away!"

It was a good half hour's job, and a hard one; twice the boat nearly swamped, and went down. The rope slipped with McCann in the sling, and the fellow went down into the water, finally being hauled up the side, and over the rail as nearly dead as alive. Liverpool was the last to leave the boat, already half filled with water. As he rose slowly, gripping the rope with his hands, unable to get foot in the noose, the deserted craft floated away, the dead body of Watson half covered with water.

The four of them made a sorry looking bunch on the deck, but now that they were safe, my feeling of sympathy had vanished. I could only recall their treatment of us, and the danger we still ran in having them once again aboard. Nothing was to be gained by soft words with such as they. I stepped across to front them, and Olson and Dugan joined me.

"Now, look here," I said grimly. "We've taken you aboard because we're human beings; but there's going to be no mistake as to your exact status on this ship. You'll take your orders from me, and I'll kill the first man-jack of you who shows a sign of treachery. What became of Sachs?"

McCann was still gasping from his drop into the sea, and could not answer, although I addressed my question to him. Liverpool replied:

"He knifed Watson, and Dubois knocked him overboard with an oar; he never cum up."

"Was it in the fight Dubois got hurt?"

"No, he was hit by the boom, an' Tony there broke his arm when he fell into the boat off the ship's ladder."

"All right; three of you are fit for work, and Tony can stand watch in the engine room. Have you had anything to eat?"

"Yes, sir, in a way; there was food in the boat."

"Then you have fared in that respect better than we have. White, you go below and hustle coal; you climb down also, Tony, and relieve Masters. Tell him to lie down and get some rest. Move along now; I'll be down there myself presently."

I watched them disappear, White sulky, and cursing under his breath, Rapello nursing his arm, and giving me a look far from pleasant as he passed. I turned to McCann.

"Get up from there; you are a hand on board this ship the rest of the voyage. Do you understand? Answer me — do you?"

"Yes."

"Do better than that."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; now you and Liverpool pick up Dubois, and put him in number seven stateroom. Make him as comfortable as possible, but don't be long about it. Then report on deck here to Mr. Olson; he'll keep you busy, and out of mischief. Take the man up carefully. Dugan, slide back the companion door. A word with you, Olson."

The second mate crossed the deck with me to the rail; the drifting boat had disappeared, having either sunk, or being hidden in the hollow of the great surges. The screw was beginning to revolve once more with power, the planks trembling under foot, and a bit of sunshine was streaming through the clouds overhead. I stood silent a moment, endeavoring to think out the situation, and Olson waited patiently, his eyes sweeping the sky and then the sea.

"What do you think of our guests?" I asked finally. "Can we trust them at all?"

"Not so far as you could swing a bull by the tail, sir," he answered soberly. "They ain't forgot the night in the boat yet, but there's just as much hell in 'em as there ever was."

"Your opinion is, they will never help sail this ship into St. John's if any villainy will save them?"

"That's it, sir; they're so black now, they won't mind a little more."

"That's my judgment; we must keep them apart as

much as we can, and have an eye on them all the time. How about Dugan?"

"He talks straight enough, and to my notion means to play square."

"That was my impression; he's Irish, and hot-headed, but no criminal. Masters can keep an eye on White and Tony down below, and with McCann in Mr. Leayord's watch on deck, and Liverpool along with you, we ought to be able to keep the fellows separated. Besides I'll be about most of the time."

"How long do you suppose it will be, sir?"

"Today and another night likely; I can tell better when I get an observation at noon. It will not give them much time for plotting."

I sent the two forward with Olson when they returned to the deck from the cabin, and he busied them gathering up the riffle about the forecastle caused by the night's storm. McCann moved as though scarcely able to exert himself, but Red took hold as if glad to be occupied. Vera came down the ladder, and we spoke together briefly, about what had occurred. She finally volunteered to get some food ready, and I went below with her, rousing up Dade, and putting him at work under her orders. An hour later all aboard enjoyed a warm meal, eating alike in the after cabin.

By two o'clock everything had settled down into a routine, and I could hardly realize the incidents of the past few hours. The wind had diminished noticeably, and the sea no longer battered us. The *Indian Chief* was again on the direct course for a port, with bow

pointed to the south of west, proceeding at half speed, with Dugan alone at the wheel, a short pipe clinched in his teeth. I had taken my observation at noon, finding that our present position was within thirty miles of where we had been the day previous. There were no signs of the missing boats, and no gleam of sail, or spiral of smoke appeared along the ring of horizon. Vera had brought a book on deck, discovered a steamer chair, and in the shade of the cabin front, made pretense at reading. As I drew near, however, I found her sound asleep. Forward, just beyond the mainmast, Olson, with two of the men, were cobbling up a small boat — the dinghy, the only one left aboard — in an effort to make it seaworthy. McCann was not among them, and Leayord was in his stateroom. The whole scene was so peaceful that I yielded to my own need of rest, certain I should be on deck all night, and returned to the cabin. I left my stateroom door open, but in ten minutes was sound asleep.

What awakened me I do not know. I had a confused sense of some heavy body falling, but no other sound. Yet this impression was so strong, so insistent, that I sat up in the berth, and stared out through the open door into the cabin beyond. I must have been sleeping for some time, for the rays of the sun no longer streamed down through the deck transom, and the cabin interior appeared dark and shadowy. I neither saw, nor heard anything, yet did not withdraw my eyes when I got to my feet; then I knew that the dark shapeless object, half under the table, was the motionless body of

a man. My throat seemed to contract, and choke me, but I forced a quick breath and stepped forward through the door. The dingy cabin was deserted, not another stateroom door open. The table had been cleared of dishes, a decanter of brandy standing alone on the swinging shelf. Underneath, with face concealed in the crook of one arm, lay a man, an ugly gash in the back of his colored shirt, through which fresh blood was oozing, and dripping to the deck. I sprang forward, and turned him over — Dubois!

I could hardly accept the evidence of my own eyes. Good God! how had this thing happened? How did the crippled sailor ever get into the cabin? Whose hand could have struck the blow? and for what purpose was it struck? It was murder, a cowardly slash from behind; no wound which could be self-inflicted, but a blow of deliberate purpose. Who aboard would have reason to seek the life of Dubois? I could think of no one; no cause for such a crime. An instant I stared, dazed, into the dead, upturned face, not even knowing where to turn, in which direction to seek the murderer. I felt as though every faculty of both brain and body was paralyzed by the shock. Yet this was but for an instant. I tried the doors of the various staterooms; all opened at my touch, excepting Bascom's, and proved unoccupied. His was locked as usual, and I felt it useless to disturb the man. Leayord was no longer below; he had doubtless awakened and gone on deck, but I discovered Dade asleep in his old berth down the passage, shook him awake, and compelled him to come back with

me. The horror of his face at sight of the dead body only intensified my own, but I had grip on my nerves by now, and was determined to learn the truth.

"Stay here until I find out what is happening on deck. There is nothing to be afraid of, you fool; the man is dead. Yes, you can stand over there, but don't leave until I come back, and keep your eyes open."

As I emerged from the companion, leaving that dingy, death shadowed cabin behind, the open deck was such a scene of quiet as to appear like another world. Vera was still resting in her chair not twenty feet away. Should I tell her the truth? Why not? The tragedy could not be concealed, and, from where she had been resting ever since I went below, she could not help but see any one passing in or out of the cabin. She glanced up, smiling a welcome, as I crossed the deck, but the expression of her face instantly changed as our eyes met.

"What is it, Mr. Hollis? Are we again in danger?"

"There has been trouble below. Let me question you before I explain. You have been here for the last hour?"

"Yes; longer even than that."

"Who have you seen enter the companion?"

"I slept at first, but have been awake for some time. Dade came out on deck a few moments, and then went back again; that must have been an hour ago. There was no one else until Mr. Leayord was called to take his watch."

"Who called him?"

"Olson; he was not below more than a minute."

"And Leayord responded immediately?"

"Yes, so quickly I remember thinking he could not have removed his clothes to lie down."

"And when was this?"

"A half hour ago; he stopped and spoke with me before taking charge of the deck."

"No one has entered the cabin since?"

She shook her head.

"No one, I am sure; Mr. Olson did not go below; he is forward there now. Please tell me what has happened?"

"Dubois has been killed," I explained briefly. "I found his body on the cabin deck. The deed was just done; his fall awoke me from sleep, but before I could leave the stateroom the murderer had disappeared."

"He—he was murdered! You are sure?"

"There was a knife wound in the back piercing the heart. The man died without a sound."

She rose to her feet, her face white, her body trembling so that I put out my hands to her support, and instantly her fingers clasped mine.

CHAPTER XXXV

A MANIAC ON BOARD

THE horror with which she looked into my face held me speechless. Could it be possible that she suspected, knew, the perpetrator of this crime — that she sought to shield him?

"You searched the cabin? You found no one?"

"Only Dade sound asleep in the steward's stateroom. I awoke him, and left him on watch below."

"There was no one hiding in any of the staterooms? You tried the doors?"

"They were all empty. Mr. Bascom's door was the only one locked."

"You — you made him open?"

"No; why disturb him?"

She drew a quick breath, her eyes on my face.

"You — you have not seen Philip Bascom lately?"

"No, not since we had supper together."

"You saw nothing strange then in his actions, or words?"

"Why nothing that I remarked. He seemed about as usual; more haggard, and nervous possibly, but he spoke cheerfully enough. What can you mean?"

"Oh, I do not really know; perhaps I ought not to say such a thing. I meant to have spoken to you about

it before, but so much happened, I forgot. I—I suspect Philip Bascom is insane."

"Insane! Good God! why do you say that?"

"He has talked to me so strangely. I cannot tell you what he has said—but—but he seems obsessed with the thought that McCann is a devil pursuing him, and driving him to hell. He—he frightened me, and I was hardly able to quiet him."

"And you suspect he killed Dubois?"

"Who else could it have been?"

There was no answer possible. Every other man on board was already accounted for. The truth was borne in upon me irresistibly. I heard Leayord pacing the deck above us, and I looked down into the girl's white face.

"Sit down here again, dear, and wait," I urged. "We must trace this matter to the bottom at once."

"You will not be harsh—unkind?"

"Assuredly not; but we cannot leave an insane person at large; no one could tell who might prove his next victim. Mr. Leayord!"

The mate thrust his head over the forward rail.

"Who has the wheel?"

"Liverpool, sir."

"Do you know if Masters is in the engine room?"

"I think he is, sir."

"Then call down, and have him send White on deck immediately; and pass the word forward to have Mr. Olsen come here."

"Aye, aye, sir; is there anything wrong?"

"I will explain presently; just now I want you to remain in charge of the deck."

Olson arrived first, and I barely had time to tell him briefly what had occurred, when White emerged through the deck opening and reported, his eyes blinking in the bright light, and his face grimy with coal.

"You wanted me, sir?" he asked, with no bluster in the gruff voice.

"Aye, White; you possess the strength and nerve for this sort of job. Miss Carrington here suspects that the owner of this ship has lost his mind. I just found Dubois lying on the cabin deck murdered — "

"Dubois, sir?"

"Yes; he had been stabbed in the back."

"And you believe the owner did it?"

"There is no one else on board who could. He is locked in his stateroom, and we've got to get him out. Come on now, both of you."

I led the way down the stairs in no pleasant frame of mind. I had no relish for the job, but was determined to see it thoroughly done. An insane man running free aboard, animated by a desire to kill, added to my other responsibilities, increased our dangers manifold. The cabin seemed so dark after the brightness of the deck above, that I grasped the stair rail and advanced almost blindly. I had reached the center of the cabin before my eyes discerned that there were two bodies outstretched on the deck instead of one. I involuntarily shrank back, gripping the sleeve of White's shirt, and pointing.

"Good God; look here! there are two bodies; he — he has got Dade also."

The sailor sprang past me, and dropped to his knees.

"Aye, it's Dade, and the poor cuss is done for, sir — it's another knife thrust in the back."

"And no longer any doubt who did it," echoed Olson, "for there's not another man aboard been aft."

"Right you are," I said, gripping myself ready to act. "And we must get him at once. Come on, both of you; if there's a fight it may take the three of us. He has a knife, and there was a gun in his drawer."

The door of Bascom's stateroom was closed, and I grasped the knob with no thought that it would yield to my fingers. But it did, and I almost fell forward into the room, catching myself, and staring about. The others crowded through after me, their eyes searching every nook and corner. The last gleam of the sun streamed in through the stern ports, and every object within was clearly revealed at a glance. The man was not there. I drew back the curtains concealing the bath, but the space was empty; only one of the round ports was partially open, the aperture far too small to admit the passage of a body. The bed had not been slept in, and was neatly made; one drawer of the desk stood open, and papers were scattered on the rug beneath; a chair was overturned on the deck; a chest in one corner had been rummaged, its contents flung aside. My eyes fell on White, his mouth open, his face grotesque in its coating of coal dust.

"Damned if he ain't got away, sir," he blurted out,

"but he never went overboard through that port — a cat couldn't ha' done it."

"No, he's aboard all right," I coincided. "But where? and for what purpose? There is no knowing what a man in his state of mind may do. Good Heavens! he could wreck the ship."

"More likely he's huntin' for McCann, sir," insisted Olson. "The lady said that wus what he went crazy over."

"But McCann is on deck, and Bascom never came out of the cabin; he's either hiding in one of these staterooms, or he has gone forward amidships through the passage. Get a light, White — take the cabin lantern. Olson and I will have a look behind these doors first, and then we'll explore between decks."

We found nothing, not the slightest trace of the fugitive. Beyond doubt he had gone forward, either seeking to escape, or with the thought that he could attain the deck through some opening amidships. I was cool enough by now to realize the peril we faced between decks, searching for the madman, whom we might encounter at any moment.

"Run on deck, White," I ordered, "and pick up a couple of marling spikes. I have a revolver. Tell Mr. Leayord the situation, and have him keep his eyes open. Better have him warn McCann, and Miss Carrington had best remain near the wheel until we get our hands on this fellow. Hurry back now."

Olson and I remained motionless, our eyes on the black opening leading forward, the dim rays of the

lantern falling on the ghastly faces of the two dead men outstretched on the deck. It was a grewsome spot, and my heart was beating like a triphammer. I made sure my revolver was loaded, dropping the weapon into a jacket pocket. White rejoined us, grasping the spikes, one of which he passed over to Olson, who tested the weight in his hand.

"Quiet as a June mornin' up there, sir," he announced, squinting about. "There ain't nobody seen nuthin' of no maniac. I reckon yer better let Olson carry the lantern, so you and I can be sorter free to grip the chap; we're bigger than the mate."

"From what I've seen of Olson he'll do his share of the fighting," I answered, knowing the Swede to be hot-tempered, and touchy about his size. "However, one will have to carry it."

"It's all right, sir," said Olson quietly, "I'll hold the glim, but if that big duffer doesn't stand up to the job, I'll bust glass an' all over his head."

We certainly made a thorough search of it. I doubt if a stray rat got by us without being seen, but from the after-cabin to the engine-room ladder we found no trace of Bascom; no indication even that he had ever passed that way. Beginning with the steward's pantry, we explored every nook and corner, flashing the light of the lantern into bunks, and behind sea-chests; clambering over boxes and barrels in the storeroom; even lifting the iron cover of the lazarette, and prowling about among the various articles stored below. The effort to locate Bascom's hiding place was absolutely vain — the

cunning of the madman overcame our diligence and wit; he had disappeared as though swallowed by the sea, leaving not so much as a clue behind.

Beyond the hole leading to the engine-room below, our advances were blocked by a steel bulkhead, watertight, pierced by a single door, to be sure, but this was closed and locked securely. To the best of my knowledge, this door had never been opened since the ship left Baltimore, and its mechanism had probably been operated from the demolished bridge. I could conceive of no way in which the crazed man could have proceeded further forward. From this point clear to the forepeak the cargo had been loaded almost chock with the main deck, and the hatches had not been lifted for a week; indeed they were battened down, and it was likely the air was foul enough by this time to strangle any human being.

"Is there any communication between the forecastle and the hold, White?" I asked, staring helplessly at the steel barrier.

"No, sir; the fo'castle is all above deck."

"How was this door manipulated? Do either of you know?"

"Well, I had charge o' loadin' the after-hold, sir," and Olson scratched his head trying to remember. "That door never wus opened but once, when Captain Hadley tested it before we left Baltimore, or maybe after we got out in the Chesapeake. I think it wus opened an' shut frum the bridge, Mr. Hollis."

"That is the usual arrangement, but there is a slot

here for a key; still the door is steel, and it looks too heavy for any one man to operate."

I leaned over, and looked down into the lighted engine-room at the bottom of the shaft. All I could see was a great wheel steadily turning.

"Masters."

The engineer stepped into view, and peered up into the darkness; he appeared burly and shapeless.

"That you, Captain?"

"Yes. Bascom, the owner, has gone crazy, and has hidden himself somewhere on board."

"Well, I'll be damned! Can't you find him?"

"Not yet; we've searched every place aft. He hasn't visited you?"

"Not to my knowledge. Tony is back in the fire-room; I'll ask him."

The three of us clung to the ladder gazing down, the light from the lantern revealing our faces. Masters was not gone a moment, but his voice had changed.

"Tony's killed, sir," he called up excitedly. "He's lying on the coal in number one bunker, cut in the back with a knife."

The words were not out of his mouth before we were scrambling down. But our haste gained us nothing. The only trail Bascom had left was the dead Italian, stretched out in the half emptied coal bunker, his lips closed forever. It was a knife thrust which had killed him — just such a thrust as had done for his two mates in the cabin above; but the madman had disappeared. However, here was proof positive that the fellow was

still on board; still hiding between decks. He had not reached the open, or flung himself into the sea. Surely within the narrow confines of the ship we could run him down. Yet the situation was baffling enough. Masters could tell us nothing; he had heard no sound, seen no shadow. He had been oiling the machinery, and a man could have slipped down the ladder unobserved, and escaped again in the same way. There was no other entrance to the engine-room; the forward bulkhead was solid; there were two ventilator shafts, but neither was large enough for the passage of a man's body, and the coal-chute was kept closed and locked at sea. Nevertheless I had these examined, determined to take no chances, and our lantern penetrated every inch of the engine-room and coal bunkers. At the end, utterly baffled, White gave vent to an oath.

"It beats me, sir," he confessed hoarsely, "unless it's a spook we're a-huntin' for."

"I wish it was; the trouble is it is a man, and a mighty dangerous one. Well, he's not down here, and he must have gone back by way of the ladder. The fellow has either found some means of getting into the hold, or else he's managed to slip on deck and perhaps is hidden in the forecastle — no one messes there now?"

"No, sir."

"Then let's have a look up above; come on, men."

"Yer ain't goin' ter leave me down here all alone, are yer Captain?" questioned Masters anxiously, "with Tony lyin' dead in there, an' a damned murderer prowlin' about?"

"He'll not be down here again, but I suppose you must have a fireman — White, you better stay."

"'Tain't no job I like, sir; I shoveled coal here already for eight hours."

"I'll tackle it, sir," interrupted Olson quietly. "That big boob would throw a fit down here every time he saw a shadow. After you get those hatches off send him in on top o' the cargo. There'd be no danger o' his gettin' hurt if Bascom was a hidin' there."

"Yer a damn liar! I ain't no more afraid than you are!"

"Then why don't you stay here?"

"I'm plumb tired out shovellin'."

"That will do, men," I broke in sternly. "There will be work enough, and maybe fighting enough for both of you. As long as you have volunteered, Olson, you may take a turn down here, and White will go with me. Keep a sharp eye out, you men below."

The two of us clambered up the iron ladder, the sailor with the lantern in his hand, the marling-spike thrust into his belt. I tested the bulkhead door again as we came to it, but it seemed as solid as the steel wall itself, and thoroughly satisfied that it had not been opened since the ship sailed, we mounted to the open deck.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE WORK OF A FIEND

IN spite of what I knew; of the horror and tragedy I had just left behind; the unspeakable terror of feeling that somewhere aboard, hidden in some black corner, lurked an irresponsible being, with murder in his crazed brain; a being devoid of all impulse, save the frenzy of hate, the desire for destruction, yet the sight of that cool, silent deck, already darkened by the gathering shadows of night, instantly calmed me, and brought back my powers of reasoning. The man was not aft; then he must be forward. It was impossible to hide long on shipboard in the face of an intelligent search. Already we had peered into every corner abaft the engine ladder below decks; all that remained unvisited was the hold, chock to the deck beams with cargo, both hatches battened down, the forecastle, the paint room, and the dingy, ill-smelling recesses of the forepeak. Of one thing I was decided — if the fellow had, indeed, succeeded in slipping forward unobserved, he was never to be permitted to return aft again unseen. I would, first of all, see to it that the decks were guarded, and then the rest of us would hunt him in his hole.

"White, you remain here in front of the cabin, and keep your eyes open. Don't let a shadow get past you aft; you understand?"

"Aye, sir."

"Give me the lantern. There is no knowing what that fellow may do; he might fire the ship, or wreck the engines, unless we get him in time."

"You think he's forward, sir?"

"Where else can he be? I'll put another man at the mainmast, and then run him down."

Leayord, attracted by the gleam of the lantern, leaned out over the poop rail.

"That you, Captain? Have you got Bascom yet?"

"No; he has managed to escape, and get forward, but not without leaving another victim behind. Tony Rapello is dead in the stoke hole."

"The bloody villain! How did he ever get out of there?"

"Which is more than I can figure out; stole on deck, probably, and then slipped along in the rail shadow. Where is McCann?"

"Just gone forward to fix the ridin' lamps."

"All right; sing out to him to keep his eyes on the deck. There doesn't seem to be a great deal of wind, or sea, Mr. Leayord; do you imagine Miss Carrington could hold the wheel for half an hour?"

"I don't see no reason why she shouldn't, sir; I've seen her do it in worse weather."

"Then ask her, please; I'm likely to need both of you if we round up that fellow. He's crazy and armed, and

sure to fight hard. Pick up any weapon you can find, and come down here."

They were beside me almost instantly, eagerly questioning as to what had occurred below, their faces expressive of the deep horror both felt at the situation in which we found ourselves. Under other conditions I know I should have felt sincere sympathy for the suddenly stricken Bascom. His former friendship with Vera, what I knew of his misfortunes, the very conception of the man's character which I had formed myself during our brief acquaintance on board, all tended to make the man an object of pity. The murders he had committed were but the result of a diseased brain, the sudden snapping of responsibility. Nor did the dead men make any special appeal; they had been when alive the scum of the sea, treacherous and brutal; enemies to be watched and guarded against. All we had lost through their deaths had been the use of their hands in navigating the vessel. Even now I held Philip Bascom, if restored to his normal condition, worth all of them. I could not hate the man, or seek him evil — but I could dread him. That was the whole of it — dread! Here was a man crazed, murderously insane, who had safely tasted blood, whose insanity had been caused by fear, and brooding over a great wrong. In his disordered brain a mad, desperate desire for revenge had overshadowed all else. To obtain this no deed was impossible, no crime too hideous. And this creature was hidden somewhere between decks, and, unless discovered and made captive, held in his hands

the fate of every soul on board. The thought of what he might do during the black darkness of the night terrorized me. There was no guessing what crazed scheme his insanity might concoct — fire, a wrecked engine, an open water cock; a dozen different possibilities flashed through my mind, each frightful in its suggestion of potent evil. At any cost we must have him within our control; we dare not even wait in hope that the man might reveal himself — we must go after him, crawling in the dark, feeling within crevice and cavity, until we uncovered his hiding place.

I explained this quickly to the two men, hiding none of my own fear, but making them comprehend the desperate need of thorough and ceaseless search. The look on their faces evidenced that my words had gone home.

"He's forward, sir; that's clear enough," insisted Leayord. "We'll nab the fellow in the fo'castle yonder accordin' to my notion. What do yer say, Red?"

"That's how I lay it out," coincided the big sailor, clinching and unclinching his hands. "He sure ain't aft; thar ain't no way I know how he could git into the hold with the hatches down; so thar ain't nothin' left except the fo'castle, an' the forepeak. We'll find the cuss thar all right, sir."

Their confidence had its effect on me.

"Good; White and McCann will guard every inch of the deck, while we take the forecastle first. Bring the lantern, Leayord."

The door was two-thirds shut, and we slid it wide

open to gain entrance, feeling our way cautiously down the steps. The place had never been a sea-parlor, but now, deserted by the crew, it presented as dismal a scene, in the dim light of the lantern, as ever I put my foot into. The air was foul with bilge-water, while rotting garments hung to the beams above, or were strewn along the deck. The shadows were grotesque and hideous, and much of the space was cluttered up by discarded sea boots, battered chests and miscellaneous riffraff which the men had left behind in their flight. I stopped at the foot of the steps, but Leayord and Red advanced to the tier of bunks, the former lifting the lantern, while the latter took survey within each. They made the circuit without evidence of any discovery, Liverpool cursing as he stumbled over various impediments in the uncertain light. Except for their heavy breathing, the occasional rush of frightened rats, and the sturdy pounding of the seas without, there was no other sound. Altogether the surroundings were too depressive for description; the scene was squalid, unwholesome, suggestive of wreck. We found no trace of Bascom, but at that I was glad enough to be back again on the open deck, breathing in the fresh night air. It was like a tonic.

The paint-room and the forepeak came next, and I explored the latter myself, as there was scarcely room in the narrow space for even one to creep about. Pushing the lantern before me, every nerve singing like a copper wire, I crawled out at last, dripping with perspiration, and as black as though I had been for half a

day in the coal hole. To Leayord's inquiries I could only shake my head.

"Well, sir," he said obstinately, "I'm a sailorman, but I never did believe in ghosts, an' I ain't a-goin' fer ter believe in 'em now. It warn't no spooks what did this job. This yere Bascom was a sure enough human the last time I put eyes on him, an' I don't reckon he's changed much since, 'cept maybe in his line o' brains; do you, sir?"

"He's flesh and blood, all right, if that is what you mean; only insanity makes them cunning."

"That's what I sed to Red here while you was crawling 'round in the forepeak, lappin' up bilge-water. He reckoned it might o' bin a ghost a doin' these things; but I claimed thet ghosts don't shove knives into sailormen; leastways I never heard o' none that did. So it naturally stands to reason, sir, that this bloomin' lunatic is still aboard somewhere. He never got out them cabin-ports, for a cat couldn't git through 'em. He never went over the rail, or some o' us on deck would a heard the splash alongside; so there's nothin' left but thet he's still on the ship."

He leaned forward, striking one hand on the other to better express his argument. I was thinking, paying little attention to his words, my eyes unconsciously viewing the ship aft. The deck was so wrapped in gloom that outside the radius of our lantern I could perceive no movement, not even determine the presence of the two men left on guard. The two masts, with their heavy spars, cast all below into dense shadow, but

beyond, on the poop, the faint rays of the binnacle lamp reflected softly on the face of the girl at the wheel, making her appear almost as a vision. The sight for an instant fascinated me

"Ain't thet so, sir?"

"Why, yes, Leayord; I am unable to see it any other way — but where?"

"Well, there ain't but one place aboard unexplored, sir. Damned if I know how he ever got there, but he's either there, overboard, or aloft; or else I've got to take off my hat to Red here, an' acknowledge it's a real ghost we've got aboard the old hooker."

"The cargo hold?"

"Aye, aye; I'm fer takin' off the hatches, and letting a man or two creep around down there; we've got to find out where that devil is."

There was no answering his logic, and a determination to complete the job was already in my own mind.

"Get the tarpaulin out of the way, Liverpool," I said sharply, throwing the lantern where the light was needed. "Cut it loose, man; don't waste time with the lashings; there's plenty of spare canvas in the sail room. What's stowed first below, Mr. Leayord?"

"That's the hell of it, sir," he replied soberly. "I never told you, for I didn't see no cause. There was a lot o' boxes come on board, sir, maybe a thousand of 'em, the ends clamped with iron, an' they was almighty heavy. We had to load 'em with the donkey engine, an' most of 'em were dumped in jist below the main hatch."

"Do you know what they contained?"

"Mr. Bascom told me they was army stoves, sir, and maybe he thought they was, fer he seemed sure about it; but along at the last the hook slipped off one of them, an' the box dropped about thirty feet, smashin' the whole end in — it was plumb full o' loaded shells."

"Loaded shells?"

"That's what; there was powder enough scattered about there ter blow the whole ship to hell an' back."

"What did Bascom say?"

"Nothin'. He was ashore, an' a lot of 'longshoremen were doin' the loadin'. I don't believe they even knew what the stuff was. I made 'em scrape up all they could and throw it overboard. I never told the owner. Likely 'nough he knew what he was bein' loaded with, an' I've sailed with more dangerous cargoes than that; but that's what's below us — loaded shells."

"No doubt other explosives are aboard. The greater reason for us to lay hands on Bascom. Take hold there with Red and help rip up that tarpaulin; now get the point of this capstan bar under the hatch closings; here's your lever — it'll take the weight of the three of us to move the iron — now, heave ho!"

We bent to it, exerting every ounce of strength, encouraged by the fact that the heavy hatch yielded to our combined effort, and began to move, to lift over the grooves, and shove back slightly. With no other thought but to gain opening enough for another insertion of the lever, we bent to the task. Something caught, rendering the great iron lid immovable.

"White," I called, "come over here, and give us a hand."

I heard him patter across the deck in his bare feet, but before he reached the bar, the fellow stopped, staring at the narrow opening, and sniffing like a pointer dog.

"Lay hold!" I called out angrily. "The weight is breaking our backs."

"But there's fire below, sir," he roared excitedly. "That's smoke a risin' out the hatch — the cargo's afire!"

I saw it now, and so did Red, and the mate — a thin, circling vapor barely perceptible in the night, curling up through the hole we had succeeded in forcing. For an instant I hardly knew it as smoke, but the fresh draught of air had already worked its miracle, and the wisp thickened as I stared into a threatening black coil, darting upward into our very faces. I dropped upon my knees, shading my mouth as best I might, and sought to peer down into the black void between decks. Away forward a red eye winked out of the darkness, then another, and a third. I leaped to my feet, realizing there was no hope, nothing we could do but get away alive — and, if we were even to do this, every second was worth a king's ransom.

"She's afire forward!" I exclaimed, striving to control my voice. "That is where the fellow was, and he's done the job; there's no stopping her now."

"There's plenty of hose forward."

"But the donkey engine is not connected, and we dare

not take chances with all those explosives below. Good God, man, we may go sky high any second. Don't stand talking; get over the dinghy, it's the only boat we have; haul her aft and swing her to these falls below the after-hatch — that will give us a chance to get away, perhaps. Jump now, the three of you. No! wait! Red and Leayord can rig the boat, and I'll give you a hand when you hook on. McCann, get a beaker of water in, and some biscuits; we'll have no time for anything else. My God! men hurry! there's flame breaking through now!"

There was; a red serpent, sticking its ugly head up the hatch opening, the ghastly light glimmering in our faces. The men seemed fairly paralyzed at this sudden outburst of new horror, but I drove them, even using hands and feet in my mad desire for action.

"Aft with it now — aft with it. All will be a mass of flames amidship in five minutes. Is there water in that keg, McCann? Then throw it in! — now the biscuit. Miss Carrington — Vera!"

"Yes, Captain Hollis."

"Can you hold to the wheel a few moments longer? — till I come for you?"

"Yes."

"Call down the tube to the engine-room; tell Masters and Olson to come on deck at once — as quick as they can foot the ladder."

"Yes, sir."

The cool quietness of her voice calmed me as though she had pressed her hand on my brow in fever. I sprang

to the help of the others, assisted to hook the light dinghy onto the falls, lifted it clear of the deck, and swung it outward over the rail. The flame streaming up the main-hatch by this time gave us light enough, and helped hurry our movements. I saw Masters and Olson emerge from the shaft, stare at the red glare, and run toward us. I have a vague impression that McCann burst out of the companion, a bag of sea-biscuits in his arms, and flung it into the stern-sheets of the dinghy. He must have done so, for later the biscuits were there. But it was impossible to think of these things, to see clearly, to realize just what was happening. Every second I expected the ship's deck to rend asunder under our feet, blowing every human being aboard into atoms.

"Overhaul those pulleys, Leayord; no, we'll load at the rail, and lower from the boat itself — are there oars? that's it; stow 'em. Olson, to the wheel with you; take a couple of turns about it with a rope's end, and help the girl down. Over the side Red, and ship the tiller; now lads, over with you. Masters, you and Leayord lay hold of the ropes — don't lose your heads now and lower too fast. Here, Red, help the lady; step quick, dear; yes, I'll come — are you all in? now where's McCann?"

CHAPTER XXXVII

A DAY IN THE BOAT

I TURNED, my fingers yet gripping the rail. Before then I had had no time to think, to appreciate the full terror of our situation, to realize the horror of the spectacle. In that last instant this burst upon me in all its vivid horror. Between the two hatches the deck was a sheet of flame; already the canvas of the lower yards had caught, and was blazing fiercely. The red writhing serpents, fanned by the wind, were sweeping aft in billows, tipped with black smoke, dense and suffocating. All about us the glare of dancing fire, the swirl of shadowy smoke clouds; the air was hot, almost blistering. I saw nothing of McCann.

"He isn't in the boat?"

"No, sir."

"Well, we can't wait — lower away — yes, I'm coming."

They must have unhooked the falls at my first word, for the boat sank just as I swung to the rail. This, and a sight suddenly revealed against the front of the cabin, held me there, clinging to a stay, struck motionless with horror. I heard Vera cry out from below:

"Robert! — Robert! Don't wait — jump!"

But the words seemed to have no meaning, no power to impress me; for an instant the sight I beheld par-

alyzed my brain. The lashed wheel still held the ship to the wind, and the clouds of smoke belched aft, becoming so dense I could not see across the deck to the port rail. I know not where they came from, nor how they had met in that last death grapple. All I know is, that suddenly, both bodies wrapped in flame, and half shrouded in wreaths of smoke, the glare of fire on their faces, every muscle straining in the intensity of struggle — McCann fighting desperately to escape; Bascom exercising all the mad strength of insanity to retain hold of his victim. If either uttered a sound, I heard it not. It was like a horrid picture projected from out the smoke cloud, and as instantly fading. I saw the men's faces, exultant hatred in one, unspeakable terror in the other; I witnessed the strain of muscle, the awful effort to rend apart arms and limbs. It was a vision of hell, yet almost before I could thus vision it, the two figures were engulfed in a sea of flame; where they went — into the seething caldron, or over the rail into the depths of ocean — I can never tell. They were there, struggling like fiends, a horror unspeakable in a frame of smoke and fire; then that curtain of death and fire dropped — and they were no more.

I may have jumped; I may have released my hold upon the backstay, and fallen. The deck planks were hot to my feet, and serpents of flame crept along the seams as though reaching for me with tongues of fire. I staggered back with hands held before my eyes, half blinded with the glare, still seeing, in crazed memory that awful spectacle of death and horror. From far

below a cry reached my ears — a woman's agonized cry shrieking upward through the crackle and roar of flames until it even penetrated my brain, and brought me life again:

"Robert! Robert! Oh, my God! — Robert, come to me!"

I turned, and gripped the rail. With one swing I was over it, my body hurtling through the air, down into the black sea. As I came back to the surface, every numbed faculty restored by the plunge, the icy grip of the water, the glow of the flames above me revealed the small boat. Dashing the moisture from my eyes, conscious only of the pleading in her extended arms, I swam toward it. Then behind me the ship burst into a thousand fragments, rending apart with the report of a mighty gun, and shooting upward in a volcano of flame. I went down — down — down, and knew no more.

If one could be in an instant transferred from the most fantastic depths of an inferno to the heavenly delights of paradise, his experience would not seem stranger, or more impossible than mine. I had sunk to death, about me every horror of noise and sight; the black night, the glare of flame, the roar of explosion, the icy clutch of water; what followed that plunge into the depths was unconsciousness. I awoke with Vera's eyes smiling into mine, her face bent above me, the golden sunlight of a new dawn resting on her hair. I could but stare up at her, unable to comprehend, half believing it all a vision to as quickly dissolve into mist. Yet I was rational, my brain swiftly clearing to the

truth. The hand which held mine was of flesh and blood; those were no dream eyes smiling their welcome, and I was lying in a boat, bobbing up and down on the surface of the sea. Words came to my lips, a whispered question:

"You — you picked me up? we are still at sea?"

"Yes, dear; oh! I am so glad! Lie still, you are not strong enough to sit up yet."

"Oh, yes I am; see, I will lean against your shoulder. Why, it is actually morning; the sun is an hour high."

My eyes left her face to survey the others, and the cockleshell in which we floated. I could hardly realize that we were actually all there. I counted them like a boy at school, reciting in class, even speaking each name aloud. The little boat bore up bravely under its load, although White and Olson were both bailing, and my eyes took note of several charred spots along the gunwale showing the touch of fire. Leayord was at the tiller, and seemed to comprehend all that I was most eager to learn.

"Yes, we're still afloat, sir," he said, with a sailor's hopefulness. "But it's God's mercy. By every token we should have been blown out of the water when the *Indian Chief* exploded, but somehow the gust of it didn't hit us. We was showered with fire, an' hit by a lot of flyin' stuff, but nuthin' to wreck the boat. White had his arm broke by a piece o' timber, an' an oar went overboard. But how we ever kept right side up in this little dinky boat when thet big iron pot sunk is morn' enybody but God could tell. We just couldn't do

nuthin' but just hang on. We wus way up there, sir, a scrapen' the clouds, an' then down in a hollow that seemed a mile deep; an' when we come up out o' that, there you was, sir, shootin' out o' the waves straight at us. The girl, she saw you an' screamed; she'd have gone over after yer, if I hadn't grabbed her, an' then Red he got a boat hook inter the collar of yer jacket, an' we hauled yer in over the side."

"That must have been hours ago."

"Quite a spell, sir. Something hed hit yer head, an' it bled a bit. The young lady has been a holdin' yer on her lap ever since; she tore her skirt—"

"Never mind that, Mr. Leayord," she interrupted, "we all of us did what we could. Olson, will you pass back a biscuit and a water bottle; Captain Hollis will regain strength if he has something to eat."

I smiled at her, and accepted the biscuit.

"How are we fixed on food? I only want my share."

"We have had one apiece; there were two bags thrown in; we can thank McCann for that, the poor devil."

The memory of that spectacle of horror witnessed on the blazing deck came suddenly back to me, and I hid my eyes, every muscle of my weakened body trembling. I felt Vera's arms hold me tight.

"What is it, Robert? You are in pain?"

"No; the suffering was mental, not physical. I—I saw McCann's death; that was what held me on board so long. Bascom got him; they—they went down together, fighting in each other's arms, in a sheet of flame. No words can picture the horror of it. God!

let's not talk of that any longer. I—I must keep my mind."

"Yes, dear, we will not talk of it," tenderly. "Our own situation is surely bad enough; you must tell the men what to do."

I lifted myself, strengthened by the appeal, eager to be diverted.

"The boat is taking in water?"

"Not a great deal, sir; she is so deep loaded some splashes over the gunwale. We're all right so long as the sea keeps like it is now."

"Are you steering by compass?"

"No, sir, by sun. I just naturally headed west; that's the nearest coast, I reckon?"

"Yes; it's a matter of guess work. As a rough reckoning I should think we might be seventy miles at sea. We're over-loaded, but I imagine many a fisherman's dory has made a worse voyage in these waters."

"Are these fishing seas, sir?"

"The best in the world. I've often read of dory crews being lost in the winter fog, and yet making land in spite of the storm and cold. If they can do it in such weather, there is no call for us to give up while the boat floats. The first job should be to rig a sail; there is one oar left?"

"Aye, sir, and a paddle."

"Good enough. Red, cut a hole in that forward thwart with your sheath knife; not too large now. Any canvas aboard?"

"Only these strips."

"They'll do for stays, and to make secure. The sail will have to be a shirt — Olson, how about yours?"

He peeled it off without a word, and helped me fasten it to the oar blade. It was a rough bit of work, yet served the purpose, and when we had stepped the improvised mast, bracing it as best we could with the paddle, and the outspread garment bellied out in the fairly fresh wind, the sight put new heart into all of us. I could but note the fellows staring at it, and then at the rushing green water alongside, as though calculating our progress. No doubt it was small enough, yet the very knowledge that we were moving at all tended to bolster our courage, and arouse hope.

"Isn't there enough left of that painter rope to reach from the top of the oar blade to the bow?" I asked. "Surely there is; run her through the ring bolt. Now who will donate another shirt for a jib?"

Red was the quickest, and in ten minutes the dinghy was fairly lying down to it, the two shirts — one gray, the other mottled blue — bellying out bravely, their empty sleeves flapping like signals of distress, as the laden craft, plunged and leaped through the trembling water.

"Ease her a little, Leayord," I said. "Better to ship a bit of water than strain her seams; that's more like it. Why, men, we must be doing five knots, and that's famous."

There was nothing more to be done; the boat rode fairly steady, and one man could easily keep her clear of water. The others disposed themselves as best they

might, occasionally exchanging a word or two, but mostly staring about at the expanse of sea. Leayord hung on to the tiller, while I held to Vera's hand, and we spoke in low voices for each other alone.

"It is wonderful," I whispered, "how you stand all this hardship; your eyes are tired, but it has not otherwise marked your face."

"I am glad. It is because you are with me. I cannot tell you how I suffered while you remained on board that ship. I cried out for you; I could not help it."

"And it was your voice which saved me," I answered soberly. "The sound of it brought me to myself. I never had so strange an experience. The horror of that sight suddenly revealed in smoke and flame; my inability to aid McCann seemed to completely paralyze every faculty. I had the feeling of a dead man; I could not move hand or foot. Perhaps a bird feels that way in the snare of a snake. It was your cry — your word 'Robert' — which restored me to life, and sent me hurtling over the rail. You saved my life as much as though you had reached out and grasped me."

"Oh, I am so glad; all the love of my heart was in that cry."

"What a mistake we made when we chose this voyage," I said regretfully. "It has brought only hardship and peril."

"I do not regret," and her eyes gazed frankly into mine. "Truly I do not. There was no other way for us to know and love. Robert, if this was the end, I should be glad of my choice. I would rather go down

here in these waters clasped in your arms, than to be compelled to live on in the world without you."

"My sweetheart; but I will not imagine such a fate. We have struggled on through too much to have the end come in this desolate ocean. We must win — the Newfoundland coast is not so far away, and these are sailors with us. You trust, and love me?"

"With all my heart."

"Together we will have faith in God."

I do not know how long we talked in such sweet intimacy as we had never known before. I must have been weak, I think, from the wound I had received, and the loss of blood; for, in spite of every effort, I felt an unconquerable drowsiness, my head drooping forward. She was quick to notice this, urging me to rest against her shoulder, but I refused.

"Then I will make you sleep," she said quietly. "Oh, yes I will, for the safety of us all may depend on your wakefulness tonight. Lie down here with your head in my lap. Robert, I insist you must. Please do; oh, thank you. Now don't try to talk — just sleep."

Her hand softly stroked my temples, her shoulders shielding me from the sun; her sweet face bending over me; her eyes smiling confidently into mine my own grew misty, and I finally lost consciousness even of her presence.

She told me later that I lay there motionless for two hours, so still, so softly breathing, as to almost frighten her. Twice she leaned close to assure herself that I did actually breathe, and her fingers felt for the beat of

pulse at my wrist. It was the coma of sheer exhaustion. The bull-like roar of a startled voice forward awoke me. I caught no word, only the sound, but there was a note to it like the violence of a blow. I sat up, staring about, the entire scene within the range of vision photographing itself upon my brain. The ocean heaved in long green billows, crested with foam, the boat rising and falling as steadily as a rocking chair; the sun no longer beat down upon us from a cloudless sky, but appeared as a fiery red disk through a cloud of vapor, which swept along the surface of the water obscuring the circle of horizon. Liverpool stood erect in the boat's bow, holding himself firm by gripping the inverted oar, his free hand hollowed to make a trumpet of his voice. Every other face was turned forward, yet for an instant, the flapping shirts, improvised for sails, prevented my seeing the cause of excitement. Then Leayord, with an oath, jammed down his helm, and the dinghy swept to port, mounting a wave crest like a bird in flight, and there burst out directly ahead the sharp prow of a two-masted schooner, bearing straight down toward us, sailing before the wind.

"Ahoy there! Ahoy!" yelled Red and Olson, almost in one voice. "Port your helm! Damn you, port your helm!"

It was almost like a vision, that vessel — a grim, menacing specter, leaping straight on toward us out of the mist, the white foam circling from her sharp cutwater, her spars and ropes silhouetted against the gray fog, her main sheets reefed, but with topsails bellying

to the sharp breeze, yet with not a sign of human life visible.

"Put your helm down, Leayord! Hard down, man," I sobbed. "My God! she'll be into us in a minute! Ay! that's better; stand by, forward. If there is any chance lay hold."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A DEATH SHIP

IT was a matter of seconds if we cleared. With drawn-in breath, our hands gripped, our eyes staring in fixed horror, we faced that sharp, murderous stem, as it drove through the green surges straight toward us. Leayord, his full weight on the tiller bar, his lips open with an oath unuttered, was motionless as stone, and the boat shot to one side, a cascade of water pouring over its lowered gunwale, as it sped like a frightened deer for safety. The deadly copper sheathing missed us by barely ten feet, the swift rush of the flying schooner fairly whirling us about, scraping along the side so closely that the paddle which Olson used as a fender was actually torn from his hands, and a great gash made in the dinghy's rail.

It was God's miracle that we lived and kept afloat; that we were not sucked under, or crushed into driftwood. To this day I know not what occurred, or how we held upright. There was a crash, a crunching sound, a mad plunging of the tortured boat under us. My hands gripped vainly at the steel sides slipping past—then suddenly the wild race ended with a jerk, with a leap of the boat through a surge of water drenching us to the skin, and we struck the schooner's side a blow which, it seemed to me must crush every plank into

atoms. I held Vera to me ready for the end, but Leayord yelled wildly:

"That's it Red! make fast there! make fast! Lively now, before we go down. The mizzen chains, Olson! Up you go, my lad — by God! he made it!"

I was on my feet now, understanding it all, realizing the value of each second, knowing that the shattered boat must be sinking under us. I also got grip on the chains, and the three of us held on desperately, Red hauling the single rope end taut, and looping it about the thwart.

"Here, Olson; reach your arms down; take the woman first — there's no time to wait for help. Now Vera — quick girl; the boat is sinking under us."

She stepped onto my shoulders, grasped the chains to steady herself; then gripped Olson's hand, sprang upward, and was drawn safely in. I turned to the others.

"Make fast Red. There is nothing more to be done, but get out. One at a time now; here White, you're crippled, go first — hoist him up, Masters; now ease in there, Olson — good enough. You're next Masters."

Leayord and I were the last, and we left the dinghy swamped behind us, dangling and crushed against the steel side of the schooner, upheld only by the strength of the rope. It was all the work of a feverish minute, in which thought was impossible because of the stress of action. But now, as I clung breathless to those lower mizzen ratlines, the seven of us jammed upon the little platform, the green surge of water below slushing against the wreck we had just left, the strange silence

of this vessel which we had boarded struck me with full force. In heaven's name, what could it mean? It was broad daylight; if there was a man alive aboard, he could never have failed to see or hear us in this fierce struggle for life. Yet no one was visible; no sound of voice was heard; no face peered over at us above the rail. It was like a ghost schooner, and I felt the very heart of me chill as I stared into the blank faces of my huddled companions, and along the shiny sides, and the deserted rail.

"This is a rum go, sir," ventured Leayord soberly. "Ain't she got no crew?"

"I don't know what to make of it," I confessed, "but we'll soon find out. Help the lady, Leayord. Olson, come with me."

We footed the ropes, and swung up to the rail, clinging there long enough to gain swift view of the deck beyond. It was as clean as a millionaire's yacht, and had the appearance of one, with brasswork glistening, and paint fresh and bright. Every rope seemed coiled in place, the sail gaskets firmly tied, the planks spotless, the canvas as white as though just out of the sail-loft. My eyes surveyed the whole fore and aft — the low forecastle, the cook's galley, with door standing wide open, revealing a fireless stove, the boats in chocks, not one missing, the after cabin on the deck level, its companion door ajar, the wheel astern, outlined against the sky, swinging slightly to a lashing of rope — and nowhere a human being. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes.

"My God, Olson; there's not a sailor on deck," I gasped.

"No, sir; it beats me; I've been at sea a long time, sir, but I never see nothin' like this — they ain't left, fer the boats are all there, an' damn me, the wheel is lashed. She's just a sailin' herself."

"There's no sign of any trouble aboard. Why, those decks are scrubbed like a Dutchwoman's floor. Hurry up, Leayord; the schooner seems deserted. Come on, mate, we shall have to clear this mystery up."

We sprang down on the deck, and the others came tumbling over the rail after us, each face expressive of mystification. Vera touched my sleeve, her eyes searching mine.

"What can have happened?"

"I do not in the least know," I answered. "The mystery is too deep to guess at. There has been no storm, no fire, no evidence of desertion, every boat seems to be in its proper place. The only thing I can think of as possible is drink. The whole crew may be drunk, but that seems like a dream. However, we can't stand here doing nothing. White, you are not of much use with that broken arm, so remain alongside Miss Carrington. Keep your eyes open. Leayord, you and I will have a peep into that cabin; the rest of you take the forecastle. Be careful, lads, but don't miss anything — scatter now."

I watched them go forward, their reluctance apparent enough. The superstition of the sea was in their blood, and every man among them was seeing ghosts; had it

been dark not even a threat of death would have driven them into that grim hole. Leayord grinned, as I turned and faced him.

"They are fair scared, sir," he said, "they think they're aboard a spook ship."

"And how about you?"

"Me! oh, I was brought up ashore, sir; but since then I've seen so many queer things afloat, I've come to take them as all in the day's work. This here is a bit strange, but it'll all straighten out, I reckon."

"You have a theory then?"

"Well, maybe not that exactly," he admitted gravely. "But I expect we'll find every mother's son on board drunk; there ain't no other way such a thing could happen."

"Well, we'll know in five minutes; let's try our luck aft."

I slid back the companion door, and entered slightly in advance. The cabin floor was on a level with the main deck, and its glass front flooded the interior with light. A glance revealed everything, and I stood motionless, my breath caught in my throat, my hand still gripping the edge of the door. I was aware that Leayord peered in across my shoulder, and heard his startled lips utter one muffled exclamation. It was a low-ceiled apartment, painted white, with ports along the sides, the only staterooms being aft. A bright-hued rug covered the floor, and there were leather divans under the ports. The table in the center was fully set for a meal, covered with a white cloth, and glistening

bravely with china and glass. There was food in abundance, partially eaten, and wine glasses half-filled. I saw all these details; I recalled them afterwards, yet in that first instant of horror, the impression left upon me was merely of those silent, motionless figures sitting upright in their chairs. God! it was a grewsome sight! They actually seemed alive; as though they must turn and speak, challenging our presence — and yet I knew them to be dead! A great monster of a man faced me, his white, ghastly face appearing above a shaggy, gray beard, his sightless open eyes, staring full into mine. A wine glass had fallen from his opened fingers, and lay broken on the deck. Indeed, every one had apparently died as by a stroke, retaining exactly the posture last assumed in life.

To the right of the broad-shouldered giant was a thin, young fellow, scarcely out of his teens, but with a hard, repulsive face, and at his left a dark faced man almost a negro, grinned horribly, as though death had stricken him even as he laughed. Nothing could be more awful to look upon than the gleam of his teeth, beneath the fantastic curl of his moustache. There were six altogether, five sitting upright in swivel chairs, screwed to the deck, or leaning forward with heads resting on the table. The sixth, gray-haired, and partially bald, had fallen side-ways, and lay in a shapeless heap on the rug. They had the look of seamen, and were roughly dressed, three of them plainly foreigners, one with rings in his ears. The big man alone possessed the appearance of leadership.

I saw all this in that one swift glance. Breath had not come sobbing back to me, when Leayord's hand crushed my arm, and his voice rumbled into my ear.

"Good God, Captain! they're dead! they're all dead!"

"Yes," I answered, choking over the words, "there is no doubt of that. Something terrible has occurred here. Call — call the other men."

I heard him stumble out through the companion door, and the roar of his voice as he shouted to those forward; I could distinguish the sound of their feet on the deck, but could not remove my gaze from that awful sight in the cabin. The eyes of that giant dead man, staring at me so fixedly across the table, held me as in a vise — there was something so ghastly, so terrible, about their expression, as to rob me of all sense, all courage. The men joined me, Liverpool entering in advance, and pushing past where I stood. I have no recollection of seeing the others, although I felt and heard their presence. But I saw him — marked his sudden stop, the quick blanching of his face, and the sharp oath which burst from his lips, the swift, incredulous look of surprise, of recognition, which leaped into his eyes. He was staring straight into the ghastly face of the giant opposite. I doubt if he even saw any of the others.

"Hell's fire!" he shouted. "If it isn't Gaston de Lys! So you've got it at last, you old devil."

He leaped forward, circled the table with a single stride, hate, memory, whatever the impulse might be, conquering all fear, and gripped his hand hard on the

dead man's shoulder. And then he stiffened, every muscle of his body stricken; I could see death strike him, his jaw set, his eyes fixed — an instant he stood rigid; then his whole form seemed to contract and he fell lifeless to the deck.

I sprang toward him, but Masters gripped me, and hurled me back.

"Hands off — all of you!" he screamed. "Wait! don't lay a finger on any of them; you are dead men if you do."

"What do you mean? what is it?"

"The most diabolical bit of deviltry ever contrived," he answered. "Those men have been killed by electricity; the current is still on. I heard the whir of the dynamo as I came aft. Don't move until I find the switch and disconnect; for God's sake stand where you are."

Perhaps he was gone five minutes; I could never tell; I saw nothing but those dead men; heard nothing but the heavy breathing of my mates in the doorway. No one spoke; but once, it seemed to me, I caught the throb of that deadly dynamo, yet even as I seemed to distinguish the faint sound, it ceased abruptly. Masters pushed in past me.

"Ay, that was the truth," he said, "but it's safe enough now. Lord! did you ever hear of such a damn, cold-blooded crime. See here, men, the villain planned his job well — here are the wires along the deck, pressed into a seam, and connected to each swivel chair. See, the circuit is complete, and no one would ever suspect.

All he had to do was stand back there in the steward's pantry, and press the switch. Those six men died before they could wink an eye."

"But the fellow who did it? what has become of him?"

Masters shook his head.

"I don't know, sir; but there must have been one; there ain't none o' these dead men who could have turned the trick."

"Perhaps it was that cuss dangling over the side, Captain," said White's voice, from back behind the others.

"What is that?"

"There's a fellow got jammed in a small boat along side, sir. I just happened to look over, and saw him a' hangin' there."

I glanced again about the cabin, and then into the faces of those grouped in the doorway.

"There is nothing more we can do here, is there, Masters?"

"Not a thing, sir; those men are sure dead, an' Red has gone along with his old friend."

"Then let's see what this other affair means on deck; it may clear the mystery."

We were glad enough to escape that cabin of horror, and I slid the companion door too, and bolted it, before following White across the deck to the starboard rail. Excited as I was, obsessed by this awful tragedy, my mind yet grasped every detail — the shining brasswork, the spotless decks, the white boats in their davits, the

snowy canvas aloft. The very immaculateness of the vessel seemed to add to the horror, and it was a shock to even read the schooner's name, painted on a life buoy: *Rose of Gaspé.* I saw Vera standing alone, almost where we had first reached the deck. I waved my hand to her, but she made no attempt to follow us.

A glance below revealed the whole story of accident. It was clear enough to be read instantly by a sailor's eyes. The man in his efforts at escape, had chosen one of the smaller boats, but one staunch, and well equipped. No doubt it had been secretly prepared in advance, for the lockers contained food, and a beaker of fresh water was securely lashed to a front thwart. There was also a spar and sail aboard, safely secured, together with a pair of serviceable oars.

What had happened, as seemed clear to us, was this: a heavy brass-bound chest, of odd workmanship, and dingy appearance, had been stowed away in the bows. It must have been placed there with rope and pulley, for no single pair of arms could ever have lifted it over the rail. Then the fellow had clambered in, eager to be off, no doubt, and undertaken to lower the boat, standing probably amidships, where he could manipulate both ropes. But the forward rope must have jammed in the pulley, permitting the stern of the suspended boat to sag suddenly enough to send the heavy chest sliding aft. Before he could check the fall, or save himself by leaping overboard, it had pinned his legs against the stern sheets; and there he dangled still, his face buried in the green water alongside, his knees

crushed helplessly beneath the weight of the chest — an inert dead body.

"The fellow got his, sir," said Leayord solemnly. "Likely enough killed by the very thing he was tryin' to git away with. What shall we do with the boat and what's in it, sir?"

"Untangle that pulley slowly, and hoist up even with the rail," I answered. "We'll have a look at the man, and find out what's in the chest; it's an odd looking affair."

"Aye, aye, sir; Olson you man that other rope. A hundred years old, I'd say, an' stowed away in some odd corner o' the world at that. Now pull — steady; all the weight is on my end."

I helped balance it, and with White using his uninjured arm, we drew the dead man's body in over the rail. The two mates released his limbs from the grip of the chest, and we laid him out on the deck. He was an ill-looking fellow, deeply tanned, with a livid scar across one cheek, and an anchor tattooed on his forearm. Leayord drew a paper out of the inner pocket of his shirt, and passed it over to me. It was a letter with no date line, or signature, and had been so soaked in salt water as to be almost illegible. The only connecting words I could study out were: "De Lys has all his men but a cook; try to get on! he'll never know you after these years."

"Does it tell you anything, sir?" asked Olson anxiously.

"Not much; only this fellow sailed as cook, and got

the job for a purpose. He had known De Lys years before."

"De Lys?"

"Yes; that was the name of the big fellow in the cabin; he must have been at the head of the party; the one Liverpool knew as Gaston de Lys. Get that chest onto the deck; no doubt the secret is there."

CHAPTER XXXIX

A SECRET OF THE SEA

WE were compelled to resort to rope and pulley, and then search through the dead man's clothes to discover the key. Even with that found, it required the sharp edge of a hatchet to force open the cover. As it lifted the sight within was greeted with cries of astonishment.

"Good Lord, sir, it's money, and a stack of it!"

"English and French coins!"

"Aye, and Spanish!"

"This piece is Dutch!"

"There ain't a shiner there, sir, less'n a hundred years old — look at this one 1763."

White's voice broke in above the babble, the old harsh croak I remembered so well:

"Well, see here lads," he shouted, "whose is all this gold anyhow? ain't it just naturally ours? It's sure no good to these yere dead men, an' there want nuthin' else aboard when we come. Then why ain't it ourn now to divide share an' share about?"

"Sure it's ours," chimed in Masters eagerly. "We saved it and have a right to claim a share. That's sea law. What do you say, Mr. Hollis?"

"We undoubtedly have a claim," I answered, "for salvage; and if the heirs of the rightful owners are un-

able to prove themselves justly entitled to the gold, perhaps we might hold the entire amount."

"Piffle!" snorted White, "what's the use o' all that poppycock! These fellows likely enough stole the money, or else dug it up somewhere. It never belonged to them eny more'n it does to us. Nobody knows the stuff even exists. Why should we go around tellin' about it? I'm fer dividin' it up square between the five o' us — no, by Heavens, I'll count in the girl for a full share — the six, and never sayin' nuthin' about it when we go ashore. Ain't that the best way, mates?"

There was a mutter of voices, and a glance about at the faces told me that Masters and Olson were ready enough to accept White's line of reasoning, while even Leayord felt the temptation. I knew also, without looking up, that Vera had crossed the deck quietly and now stood beside me, gazing down at the treasure revealed in the open chest.

"Do you agree to this Mr. Leayord?" I asked suddenly.

He lifted his eyes to mine in bewilderment.

"I don't just know, sir," he stammered. "It doesn't seem exactly the square thing — is it, sir?"

"No, it's not," I answered firmly, and I slammed down the cover, locked it, and put the key in my pocket. "Now look here, men, and you particularly, Jim White — this isn't our gold. I do not know who it belongs to, or how these dead men ever came into its possession. But there is a curse on the stuff, which has already cost the lives of eight men that we know of. No one has

touched it, but to die. I'll tell you fellows plainly just what I'm going to do. I'm going to sail this schooner straight into St. John's harbor, with those dead men locked in the cabin, and this chest of gold here unopened on the deck. It is going to be English courts which will decide the ownership of this chest and its contents — not Jim White. Are you with me, Leayord?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"And you, Olson?"

"I suppose that's best, sir," reluctantly. "I don't want any trouble."

"I thought not; now fall to all of you, and shake the reefs out of those topsails. I'll take the wheel, and we'll point the bow toward port."

There is so little more of interest to be told, I scarcely know how best to express it in words. The three whom I had thus overruled were far from satisfied, but we gave them no opportunity for action. Either Leayord, or myself were always awake, and within sight of the chest, while Vera took her trick at the wheel, thus enabling us to keep the discontents busy forward most of the time. I was perfectly indifferent as to what they thought, or planned, being fully occupied in getting all possible speed out of the schooner. We slept on deck, no one among us having any desire to again enter the cabin which remained locked and left alone to its ghastly occupants.

The morning of the second day the speeding *Rose of Gaspé* rounded the northern head, and swept like a fair white bird into the beautiful harbor of St. John's. We

tied up at Long Wharf, and, within an hour, I had told our story to the Port Captain, and officers of the marines had taken possession of the vessel. That very afternoon, the five of us gave our testimony before the maritime court, and were permitted to go free. Before leaving the courtroom the judge spoke with me privately.

"This is indeed a strange case, Captain Hollis," he said, "and, perhaps, the truth will never be learned, yet it is evident that you and your crew had nothing to do with the death of these men, or the possession of this chest of money."

"May I ask, Judge, if anything has been discovered tending to explain the voyage of the *Rose of Gaspé?*"

"Nothing satisfactory as yet. There were no papers of value found in the cabin — an excellent chart of the Labrador coast, a memorandum in French, so discolored as to be almost unreadable, accompanied by a rudely drawn map, and a list of the schooner's crew."

"What was the name of the cook?"

"He shipped as Gustave Montain, of St. Clair. There is no such man known in that village."

"And the leader, Gaston de Lys?"

"We find trace of him only for a few months, Mr. Hollis. Where he came from, and whither he went are thus far unknown. Gaston de Lys appeared in Placentia some two months since, accompanied by one of the men who died with him in the schooner's cabin — the one dark faced — like an Indian — and sought among the fishermen there for a certain type of boat. They were very particular, stating they wished to leave for

a voyage of three months, representing themselves merely as travelers for pleasure who desired to cruise along the Labrador coast. At last they leased the *Rose of Gaspé*, from a man of wealth, Richard Martin, who had previously used the schooner as a private yacht. It was refitted and provisioned, and the crew arrived from Halifax. None among them was known in Placentia, but the inhabitants say that only two or three among them had the appearance of sailors. They put to sea seven weeks ago. Beyond that we know absolutely nothing."

"But the chest of coins? have you no knowledge as to where it came from?"

"No more than a mere guess; there is no guide. Beyond doubt this Gaston de Lys learned of its existence somewhere in Labrador, and planned its recovery. The men with him also knew what it was they sailed to seek. In my judgment this must be a treasure of the old Hudson's Bay Company, lost and hidden a hundred years ago, yet we can get no trace of such a disappearance of coin in the records. We cannot deny its existence; it is here now in our custody, but who its rightful owner may be, will probably never be determined."

"Then what will become of it?"

He smiled.

"That is rather a fine question of law. I should say that you men who recovered it at sea, have the best claim, although it must be held intact for a certain length of time to give any rightful claimant opportunity to furnish proof of ownership. Of course, in

case no such claimant appears, the government takes its share."

"And the amount contained in the chest?"

"Exceeded seven hundred thousand dollars."

I rejoined Vera at the hotel, standing beside her in a window looking out upon the harbor. Below us was the white schooner in which we had ended our strange voyage.

"We are all free to go now, dear," I said. "The examination is all over."

"Have they found the owner of the money?"

"No; they have not even the slightest conception as to whom it originally belonged, or where it came from. The law compells them to hold it intact for the present."

"For how long?"

"Two years, I think; then the greater proportion is given to those who recovered it — the state retaining a certain share."

Her eyes met mine.

"I wonder if you know where my share will go, if I ever receive it?" she asked softly.

"I think I do, and mine will be added to it — to the mother and sister of Philip Bascom."

"Yes; and — and we may never know who these men were, or the story of their quest?"

"Most likely not; it will remain a secret of the sea. Who was Gaston de Lys? Where, and how did he learn of this hidden treasure? From where in the Seven Seas did he gather together the men who went with him? To what strange coast did the peaceful *Rose of Gaspé* sail?

What motives of hate, or cupidity, led to the murderous crime of Gustave Montain? and how much of the truth did Liverpool Red know? had he lived, could he have lifted the veil?"

She was silent a long while, her hand clasped in mine; then she lifted her face, and smiled.

"It — it has been full of hardship, of sorrow, yet Robert I love the sea."

"And I, sweetheart," I answered earnestly, "for out of its mystery into my heart has come the one woman."

THE END